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HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

**OTHER BOOKS FOR GIRLS BY
MARION AMES TAGGART**

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HER DAUGHTER JEAN

BETH'S WONDER WINTER

BETH'S OLD HOME



“NOT SUCH TALL, TALL GIRLS MY DAUGHTERS!”

HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

A Story for Girls

BY
MARION AMES TAGGART



ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANCES ROGERS

GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1916

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*Dedicated
with love to
Florence Ames*

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HOLLYHOCK HOUSE

CHAPTER ONE

“THE ROSEBUD GARDEN OF GIRLS”

Mary, Jane, and Florimel—these were the three Garden girls. Mary, Jane said, “looked it.” She was seventeen, broad and low of brow, with brown hair softly shading it, brown eyes, as warm and trusty as a dog’s, looking straight out upon a friendly world from under straight brows and long brown lashes; a mouth that might have been too large if it had not been so sweet that there could not be too much of its full rosy flexibility. She had white, strong teeth and a clean-cut, reliable sort of nose, a boyish squareness of chin, and clear wholesome tints of white, underlaid with red, in her skin. She was somewhat above medium height and moved with a fine healthy rhythm, like one thinking of her destination and not of how she looked getting to it. Last of all, she had wonderfully beautiful hands, not small, but perfectly modelled, capable, kind, healing hands which, young as they were, had the motherly look that cannot be described,

yet is easily recognizable, the kind of hand that looks as if it were made expressly to support and pat baby shoulders.

Jane was quite right: Mary Garden did "look like a Mary."

Jane herself, at fifteen, did not in the least suggest her name. She was small, slender, if one were polite, "thin" if not. She had red hair of the most glorious, burnished, brilliant red, masses of it, and it was not coarse, like much of the red hair, but fine and uncontrollable. It glowed and rose and flew above and around Jane's startlingly white face till it might have been the fire around the head of an awakened Brünhilde. No one could have said positively what colour her eyes were. They possessed life rather than tint. They flashed and dreamed, laughed and gloomed under their arching brows of red gold, through their red-gold lashes, with much of the colour of her hair in them. Her face was long, with a pointed chin and a delicate little nose; its thin nostrils quick to quiver with her quickened breath. Her upper lip was so short that her small, even teeth always showed; her mouth was sensitive, not to say melancholy. Her neck was long and slender and swan-white. Her shoulders sloped; she was not more than

five feet tall; her hands were long and thin, quick and fluttering, like her lips. Altogether Jane was exactly the opposite of her prim, old-time name.

These two Garden girls had received Garden names from their father and his family. He had been Doctor Elias Garden, doctor of letters and physics, not of medicine; a grave man, devoted to study, old of his age, and that age twelve years more than his wife's, to whom he had left his three little girls, when Mary was four years old, by dying untimely.

The third child this girl-wife had named. The mother was but twenty-four, and she was understood to have been fond of sentiment and the ornamental; she named her baby Florimel, out of Spenser's "Fairy Queen." This proved to be a misfit name even more than Jane's. Florimel was a dark little witch, black-haired, black-eyed, white of skin, with red cheeks and red lips, a tomboy when she was small, an absolute genius at mischief as she grew older, devoid of the least love of the sentimental. She whistled like the blackbird Mary called her, climbed trees, fell out of them, tore dresses, bruised flesh, got into scrapes, but also out of them, through her impetuosity. She was a firebrand in temper, yet

easily moved to pity, exceedingly loyal and loving to those she loved, seeing no virtues in those she disliked. Thus she had stormed her way up to her thirteen years, a problem to manage, except that she adored Mary so much that she could not long grieve her, and was so true and affectionate that she was sure to come out right in the end.

Young as they were, the Garden girls were three distinct types, each beautiful. Mary least could claim actual beauty, perhaps, yet she was the loveliest of the three. Jane and Florimel were creatures for an artist to rave over; Mary was the type that men and women and angels love. When Florimel was a year old their mother had left them. She was English, an artist of some sort, they knew, and she had elected to respond to the call of her art, and had gone to England, leaving her children to the more than efficient guardianship of the Garden relatives, their legally appointed guardian, Mr. Austin Moulton, their father's friend, and the devotion of Anne Kennington, the housekeeper, nurse—everything. It would have been hard to define Anne Kennington's position in the Garden household, as it would have been hard to do justice to the way she filled it.

The girls had never thought much about their mother. The Gardens had been too well-bred to decry her to her children, but they had gathered the impression that she "did not amount to much," a fearful indictment from a Garden! Mary had silently felt, in a hurt way, that *she* could never have left three little girls, no matter to whom, and she had not talked about their mother, even to her sisters. As time went on, without being told so, the Garden girls came to imagine that their mother was dead. This impression of one whom only Mary remembered vaguely could not sadden them. They were motherless; but, though they envied girls with loving fathers and mothers, they had a great deal. Each in her way, the three Garden girls were philosophers and did not imagine they were unhappy when they were not, since no life holds every form of good.

They had the solid, fine old house; Win Garden, Winchester, their father's half-brother, only twenty-four years old, so big-brotherly that it was silly to call him uncle, and they never did; and the Garden. The square house of pressed brick stood in a garden, a great, old-fashioned garden, blooming around it, as the house bloomed amid it, with its rosebud girls. Sometimes the

Garden girls thought the garden was their chief earthly good; certainly it was their chief joy. With it and one another little else was needed for companionship.

Now, in May, the lilacs blossomed and the irises were beginning, the herald shrubs were announcing themselves vanguards of the flower-beds. Many of these were filled with perennials, growing taller, more luxuriant each year, thanks to the care they got, chief of them all the tall hollyhocks which illumined the garden on all sides. The hollyhocks were so many and so magnificent that they gave their name to the Garden house. It was known as Hollyhock House to all the countryside. Other beds were left for seeds of swift-growing annuals; each Garden girl had two of these beds for her own planting and, when they flowered, one could have accurately named their owners. Even meteoric Florimel did not neglect her flowers.

Jane was singing in the sunshine as she cut sprays of white lilac. She looked like a sunray clad in flesh, with the sunshine on her magnificent hair, and her slender body pulsating with song, as a ray of light quivers in the air.

Mary looked up from her aster seedlings which she was thinning.

"You look as though you were going to fly away, Janie Goldilocks!" she cried, dropping back on her heels to regard Jane. Mary was always discovering her sister anew.

"Wish I could!" cried Jane. "Fly right up like a spark—my hair is red enough! And be a spark that wouldn't cool in the air, but keep on and on! Over the Himalayas!" she added as an afterthought; that sounded magnificently distant, big and vague.

"Over the home layers would do for me—the chicken house!" laughed Mary.

"My voice goes up and up; it's part of me, yet, when it is up, it is no longer a part of me," said Jane. "I'm here, my feet on the ground, and I can send my voice skyward, and it is mine, me, and not me. It goes very, very high——"

"I noticed it," said Mary. Indeed Janie's singing had mounted to the treetops, an arrow of sound, sharp, clear, yet never shrill.

"You old nuisance!" cried Jane. "Why don't you ever want to fly? And why do you sing in that purring alto, just like yourself? I want to jump over the moon and sing to C above high C! It's just because you've brown hair!"

"I don't know," suggested Mary. "It was the cow who jumped over the moon, and cows

are supposed to be calm folk. Maybe she was a red cow though; Mother Goose forgot her complexion."

"She ought to have been an Ayreshire cow, going up in the air like that." Janie rippled with laughter over this discovery. "Never mind, Molly Bawn; I'd soon fly back again, if I flew away from you, and I don't believe if I flew to the hanging gardens of Babylon I'd be happy to hang in them, away from the Garden garden, long!"

"Of course you wouldn't!" agreed Mary promptly. "We both know there's no place like home, but I settle down knowing it, and you keep fermenting like yeast! That's what I don't understand."

"Wine sounds nicer than yeast and ferments just as much," Jane reproached her. "Yeast is gray and ugly and smelly; grape juice fermenting is lovely. I can't help being fizzy! Fuzzy, too, and red-haired! But I'd never fly far from you, Mary blessing." And Jane ran over to hug Mary till she toppled her over. They both laughed, and returned to their flowers, one cutting, the other transplanting. Jane resumed her singing, her voice soaring high in "I love the name of Mary," transposed to an unreasonable key.

"I ought to have been the soprano Garden, with my name," said Mary. "I've the prima donna name and the secunda donna voice—no, the tertia donna voice—such as it is! The alto isn't even the second lady of the opera, is she?"

"I don't know! What in all this world is all this learned Latiny sounding count you're trying! We've always called you our Opera Star, Mary Garden, haven't we? I know what the prima donna is, but I don't know what your secunda and tertia—oh, I see! Prima is first—yes, I see! You're not much like an opera Mary Garden, I suppose, but you *can* sing! I love your voice—just like a lovely cat that's had plenty of cream, purring all contented on a cushion! Soft and true and sweet; that's your voice, little Mary Garden—even if you're not big Mary Garden!"

"Well, Jane!" cried Mary, when Jane paused. "A cat purring, after cream! But it isn't as though I thought anything about singing. What are we trying to get at? I never even think of singing. I see Win coming out of the house, and I hear Florimel talking like mad. I wonder what it is, now!"

"Goodness knows!" sighed Jane, as if anything might be expected of their youngest—as indeed it might!

Winchester Garden, the young half-uncle who seemed like a whole brother to the young girls, came down the central path of the garden to join Mary and Jane. He was good to look at, lean, but not thin, muscular, with a swinging easy walk; he had a smooth-shaven, humorous face, with keen, yet kindly eyes which twinkled in a way that matched a certain laughing twist of his lips. He was tall and his colouring was harmonious, hair, eyes, and skin all of a brownish tint.

"Hallo, little nieces! Hallo, little *nices*!" he called, correcting himself.

"Hallo, Win, the winner!" Jane shouted back. "Methinks I hear Florimel—lilfluous," said Win.

Mary laughed; Jane did not know what the word meant.

"Nothing particularly mellifluous about Florimel's voice just now," she said.

Somewhere beyond the fence arose Florimel's voice. "Come along!" it was saying sharply. "Do you think I can drag you! Big as you are? Even if I knew you wouldn't bite! Come on!" This more encouragingly. "If you only won't be shy," they heard her add in a tone of exasperated patience, "I'm sure my sisters will be glad to see you, and some one will help you out,

probably our guardian, Mr. Austin Moulton. He can do 'most anything of that sort."

"Well, what on earth do you suppose the kid has in tow, now, that requires such an assorted exhortation?" murmured Win.

Florimel appeared at the wicket gate which admitted to the garden from the street at the rear of the Garden place. But above her, over the hedge, arose another head, some ten inches higher than Florimel's dark one, the fair head of a boy about eighteen. His face was pale, his expression troubled, his eyes seemed to ask for pardon for his intrusion, but he was there. It was only when he followed Florimel through the gate, at her vehement invitation, that one saw that he limped.

Florimel was rosy from earnest and strenuous effort; her brilliant face was fairly scintillating with excitement, her dark eyes snapping. The reason for what Win had called her "assorted exhortation" was revealed by the presence of the lame boy and of a dog which she was gingerly, yet forcibly, conducting by any part available for seizure, there being no collar by which to lead her. It was a dog of varied ancestry, setter and hound predominating. On a groundwork of white a large liver-coloured spot,

like a stray buckwheat cake, was displayed on one side, and a large liver-coloured spot, with a smaller one just below it, giving the effect of the print of the sole and heel of a muddy and large shoe, decorated the dog's other side. The liver and white tail which she cheerfully waved was too broad and thick successfully to carry out its design; so was the body too unevenly developed for beauty. But the head was really beautiful, with long liver-coloured ears, soft and fine, carrying out the liver-coloured sides of the face, divided by a broad white parting from crown to tip of nose. The brown eyes looking out from this fine head were the softest, loveliest of dogs' eyes—and there can be nothing more said in praise of eyes than this.

“It's homeless!” Florimel announced breathlessly. “It hasn't any home. It's been hanging around the hotel and they won't feed it for fear it will keep on hanging around. Amy Everett and I found them driving it off—with brooms!” Florimel's voice conveyed that this weapon was of all the most unpardonable. “I grabbed its hair—they said 'twould bite, but it never would! And I pulled its ears—they're as soft! And it licked my nose before I could jump. So I'm going to keep her—please! We need a

dog, really. It is a peach; only a puppy, about six months old; they said so at the hotel. People had it and dropped it—didn't want it. Isn't it perfectly fiendish the way they do that to cats and dogs? So I want her. Don't shake your head, Winchester Garden; I—want—this—dog!"

Mary, Jane, and Win had been following this eloquence with various degrees of embarrassment, for while Florimel introduced the dog she made no allusion to the boy, whom some people, less animal lovers than Florimel, might have thought should have been first introduced. He stood patiently awaiting his turn while Florimel talked. But, after all, this was less a misfortune than it seemed, for it was absurd enough to make him laugh, and this put him slightly more at ease, besides recalling Florimel to her duty.

"My sakes, I forgot!" she cried, but not in the least contrite. "I met this—this—— Are you a gentleman or a boy?" she demanded.

This sent all four of her hearers into a burst of laughter, and laughter is a good master of ceremonies, abolishing ceremonial.

"I hope to be a gentleman soon; in the meantime I'd like to be considered a gentlemanly boy," said the stranger. His voice and manner

of speaking warranted his hope. "I am eighteen. I guess I'm still a boy. My name is Mark Walpole. I came to this town because I heard that there was a chance here for employment, but the place I was after is filled. I've had rather a setback starting out in life. My mother has been dead some years. There was a fire. It destroyed our house, and my father was—he died in it. It seems he left nothing behind him; we had been considered rather well-to-do. I'm afraid his step-brother got the best of him. He showed he hated me, and that may have been because he had wronged us. People thought so. He held the land where the house had been, and there wasn't any money. I had to start out; of course I wanted to. I couldn't have breathed in that town—this all happened in Massachusetts. So I'm seeking my fortune. This little girl seems to be in the rescue line to-day. She heard me ask for work; she was struggling along with this dog. So she annexed me, too! She seemed to think she knew some one who was sighing for a chance to start me. I didn't want to come here with her, but we couldn't seem to help it—neither the dog nor I!" The young fellow stopped and smiled at Florimel, with a glance at the others.

"Yes, that's Florimel!" cried Mary, with conviction. "She sweeps all before her."

"She's a six-cylinder, seventy-five horsepower," added Win. "But she's all right—except when she's all wrong! This time she's dead right. We're glad you came. Come into the house; there's supper soon, eh, Mary?"

"Indeed there is, a good one!" cried Mary, jumping to her feet. "Of course Florimel was right, and we are glad you came! Please don't seem to be going to refuse to stay, because you must stay, anyway! We love to have company!"

"We get dreadfully tired of just ourselves," added Jane, though this was an exaggeration of her own occasional moods. "We're awfully glad you came. This is Hollyhock House, we are the Garden girls—Mary, Florimel, Jane." She touched her own breast with her thumb bent backward.

"Winchester Garden," added Win, with a bow. "I'm Jane's uncle, but not worth her introducing. It's pretty tough to have such disrespectful nieces! I'm their father's half-brother. I'm afraid they are all trying to be sisters to me, not nieces. I know they are *trying*, if that's all! Awful trials! Come up with me to my room

and let's wash up for supper. You said your name was Mark; sure it isn't Maud? Wish it were!"

"Why?" asked the guest, evidently both alarmed and pleased by this cordiality.

"We never catch a Maud. We want to say: 'Come into the Garden, Maud'—either this nice old garden, or the Garden house—but no one turns up to fit! Come into the house, anyway. Mark is within three letters—two—of being Maud."

And Win laid his hand on the lame lad's shoulder, with great kindness underneath his nonsense, and bore him away in triumph. As he went the girls heard him saying: "We fit our Tennyson in one way: we've a rosebud garden of girls, three of 'em."

"Take the dog around to Abbie, and ask her to feed her and make a place in the woodhouse for her to sleep. She must stay to-night, anyway," said Mary. "Then hurry to get yourself ready for supper, Florimel; you're covered with white hair and dogginess!"

"Good thing to be covered with," said Florimel. "What'll we call the dog, Janie?"

"I was thinking; Chum is a nice name for a dog," said Jane.

“It’s a fine name!” cried Mary.

And Florimel saw that her dog was safe. “But I knew you’d love her, you darling things!” she cried, as she tore off, with her large and cheerful outcast rushing after her.

CHAPTER TWO

“WHO LOVES A GARDEN LOVES
A GREENHOUSE, TOO”

“We call our house a greenhouse, though it is made of red brick, because it grew all the Gardens,” explained Mary, when Win brought their unexpected guest down to supper.

The boy was less pale for a vigorous towelling, but he looked uncomfortable, like one who could neither account for his being there nor feel that he ought to be there. Mary saw at a glance that Win had adopted him without reservation during their absence. Win was a most definite person toward his acquaintances; one was never in doubt as to his attitude toward them. He loved, or he loved them not, and one never had to have recourse to a daisy to find out which it was. He kept his hand on the lame lad's shoulder, as he entered the dining-room, and smiled at him with peculiar kindness.

“Yes, we consider that a subtle bit of cleverness!” Win supplemented Mary. “The house

is a greenhouse for growing the Garden roses—see?” He waved his hand toward Mary and Jane. “It has grown other Garden plants, for that matter. My grandfather, the girls’ great-grandfather, built it, and it was owned by my father, and then by my elder brother, their father. I was born in it; so were they. It went to two oldest sons; then that last one had nothing but three worthless girls to leave it to!” Win scowled fearfully at them.

“It’s a dandy house,” said the stranger, looking around him.

It really was! The hall ran through the middle of it, with big rooms on either hand and windows catching the sun’s rays in turn, as the solid house was swung around him. The dining-room got the last of the daylight, facing westward as it did. A glowing sunset lighted up the round mahogany table, in the centre of the room, and its snowy damask, brilliant glass, and silver. Fine old steel engravings of Landseer’s pictures hung around the wall; the chairs were solid, high of back. The room gave an effect of cheer, and space, and plenty.

“I feel horribly uncomfortable, intruding,” said the guest, looking with convincing appeal and a flushed face at the girls.

"I don't think you could call it intruding to stay when you are urged to—and wanted—do you?" asked Mary.

"My only fear is there mayn't be enough to eat!" said Win.

"There is, then!" declared a new voice, and they all turned to see Abbie Abbott, bringing in a tray with creamed chicken garnished with parsley, and a steaming plate piled with flaky biscuits. Abbie might have been almost any age between twenty-five and sixty-five; in reality she was half-way between those two ages, and a character.

"You've enough to feed six delegates to a convention—and they're the hungriest things *I* ever come across, Mr. Win! Mr. Moulton and Mis' Moulton called on the phome and said they'd be over to-night," added Abbie.

"We always say Mr. and Mrs. Moulton called," remarked Jane, as Abbie disappeared. "You don't speak of every one together as you do them. I wonder why!"

"And you don't hear people calling over the 'phome' unless you happen to be Abbie Abbott," added Win. "Sounds like a sea song.

"I heard a voice across the foam:
To-night I'll tread the Garden loam;
Helm hard a-lee, I'm sailing home!"

“Win, you ridiculous fellow!” cried Mary, with her merry laugh.

Jane ran to him and shook him approvingly; Jane could never approve heartily without violence. “You lovely idiot!” she cried.

Florimel dashed into the room and collided with Abbie bringing Saratoga chips and tomatoes. “Oh, gracious!” cried Florimel, dropping into a chair.

“You may well say so!” said Abbie sternly, as she skilfully saved her burden from wreck. “Good thing it wasn’t next trip, with the coffee-pot steaming hot and the diddly cream jug!”

“Now we are all here; we don’t have to wait any longer,” announced Mary, with evident relief. “Grubbing in the garden makes me hungry.”

“Let me wait on Mr. Walpole, because I found him; Chum was starving,” said Florimel, and they all laughed.

“So am I,” said the guest, accepting the skipping Saratoga potatoes which Florimel aimed at his plate, or as many of them as arrived there. “But my name is Mark.”

“Nice, handy one, too; can’t be shortened,” said Win. “We’ll all be first-name friends from now on. I’m the oldest of the lot and I’m only

six years older than Mark. What's your specialty, Mark? Any special work you're after?"

"Paying work," said Mark, with a laugh. "I did intend to study a good while longer. I'm not prepared for any special work; not ready for it, I'm afraid, but it has to be found, if it's wrapping grocery parcels. I'd like to work with a botanist; I know more about botany than anything else."

"And Mr. Moulton is botany crazy, in an amateurish way!" cried Mary.

"I wonder how a person is an amateur lunatic," murmured Jane.

"Now, who'd expect you, of all people, to ask that, Jane?" said Win suggestively. "Mr. Moulton is at work on a tremendous book, more tremendous than it will ever be book, I'm afraid. He'll never finish it! 'A Study of the Flora of New York,' he calls it, and he's making a herbarium as big as the book. Maybe he'd take you to help on it."

"If I could do it," said Mark doubtfully.

"If nobody can possibly eat another bite, nor drink another drop, suppose we go out and watch the stars come out, and wait for Mr. and Mrs. Moulton to come over," suggested Mary.

"If it was anybody else, or we were anybody

else,” said Florimel, “and Mr. and Mrs. Moulton was their guardian—Mr. Moulton, really, but Mrs. Moulton does more guarding than he does—we’d call them Uncle Austin and Aunt Althea, but we never do. Mr. and Mrs. to them means just as much as uncle and aunt do when other girls say it to people who aren’t any relation. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton like us to call them what they really are; not relations, when they’re not.”

Mark laughed, and Win said: “Strain that, kiddums, to clear your remarks. They’re badly mixed.”

Mary explained to Mark: “Florimel means that we never fell into the way of calling people who weren’t related to us uncle and aunt, but Mr. Moulton and Mrs. Moulton are two of our cornerstones. I do wish Mr. Moulton would let you help him. Very likely his book will never be published, but I’m sure it’s fine, and as interesting as it can be to work on. Mr. Moulton would be so happy if a young person were working with him. All we can do is listen when he tells us about it, or reads us bits, but he knows quite well that we don’t understand any more about the scientific part of it than a telephone receiver would, and that must be discouraging.”

"I don't know what your Mr. Moulton would want of me, but I'd be glad enough if he could use me. You see I meant to go on studying, go to college and specialize and maybe teach, and do something worth doing in botany. But that's knocked on the head." Mark tried to speak carelessly, but the tang of disappointment was in his voice.

"No telling which is the short cut to your destination when you're young and all roads stretch out before you, my son," said Win, answering this note in the younger lad's voice and laying a hand on his shoulder with a mock paternal air. "Come on outside, and take a course in botany and astronomy, sitting in our garden watching the stars come out."

"Just a moment, Win," murmured Mary. She laid a detaining hand on Win's arm, and Mark followed Jane and Florimel through the door that led directly into the garden from the dining-room.

"Aren't we to keep him overnight?" Mary asked. "It may be he hasn't much money for lodgings, and morning seems the right time to set out."

"Why, of course, Lady Bountiful," Win concurred heartily. "Sure thing we're going to

keep him to-night! He's a mighty nice little chap, if he is out seeking his fortune, and Florimel did pick him up—like the dog!”

“He's very nice,” Mary agreed. “He has lived among nice people. But he isn't a little chap, Win; he's taller than you are.”

“What are inches?” demanded Win. “When you are twenty-four, my child, you will understand that eighteen is mere infancy.”

“In fancy! Yes, it is!” cried Mary saucily. “In reality twenty-four is nothingness.”

“Disrespectful to your uncle! Bringing his dark hairs in sorrow to the gray!” growled Win, stalking after the others to the garden.

Mary ran out to look for Anne, whom she knew she should find at that hour helping Abbie get the supper dishes out of the way.

“Anne, Anne dear, Anne Kennington!” she called as she came.

“Mary, lass, what is it?” Anne answered, coming to meet her.

She was a tall Englishwoman of about thirty-five, with the brightness of her youthful brilliant colouring beginning to fade. The red in her cheeks was hardening as the whiteness around it browned, but her eyes still flashed fires out of their depth of blue, and her hair was almost

black. She moved with a free, indifferent swing as if she had been born under the Declaration of Independence instead of the English queen. But her devotion to the Garden girls partook of the loyalty of a subject, while it was, at the same time, all maternal.

"We have a guest for the night, a nice boy a year older than I am, who came to Vineclad looking for work. Florimel met him and brought him home with her to see Mr. Moulton. Is the little room in order?" asked Mary.

"Little room, and big room, and middle-sized room, all the guest-rooms are in order," said Anne, resenting the question. "But staying the night here, Mary? A tramp!"

"Mercy, no! A gentleman and very really!" Mary set her right. "His home was burned, his father was killed in the fire, and, instead of being left well-off, he had nothing. He is from Massachusetts, he didn't say where; his name is Mark Walpole. Win thinks he is fine—it isn't merely girls' judgment."

"And Winchester Garden is only a big boy; what does he know of reading character? Though he would be a good judge of breeding," Anne conceded. "I suppose a night of him won't ruin the place, though what with Florimel

bringing home that dog and now a boy, there's no telling what the end will be! Of course I knew he was at supper; he looks a nice sort; I'll grant him that. Go on, Mary; Mr. and Mrs. Moulton are this minute crossing over. I'll see that the ewer is filled in the boy's room, and more than that it doesn't need done to it; that, and a pair of towels."

"There's no housekeeper like our Anne! You can't catch her napping," laughed Mary, hastening out to help receive her guardian and his wife.

The Garden girls and their absurdly un-uncle-fied young uncle had a habit of sitting out in their garden in the evening from such an early date in the spring that everybody croaked "malaria," till so late a date in the autumn that, figuratively speaking, the neighbourhood clothed them in shrouds and got out its own funeral garments.

But Vineclad, sitting some fifteen miles back from the Hudson River, never administered malaria to its trusting children, and the old Garden garden could never have been persuaded to harm its three girls, between whom and it was a love profoundly sympathetic.

Mary found Jane, Florimel, Win, and Mark,

with Chum nearby, in the comfortable wicker chairs which stood about on the grass with which the garden emphasized its paths, permitting it to grow as a small lawn on the west side of the house. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton were just coming toward them through the broad path which led directly from the side gate.

Mr. Moulton was not above medium height. His hair was grizzled, as was his short-cropped moustache; he stooped and peered at the world through large-lensed glasses, as if he regarded everything, collectively and separately, as specimens. Mrs. Moulton, on the other hand, carried herself so erect that she might have been protesting that the specimens were not worth while. No one had ever seen her dishevelled, nor dressed with less than elegant appropriateness to the time and occasion. The result was that she conveyed an effect of elderliness though she was not quite fifty years old, which is young in this period of the world's progress. Her light-brown hair showed no thread of gray, her aristocratic face was still but lightly lined, and her complexion was fair, yet one thought of her as of a person growing old, though doing so with great nicety.

The three Garden girls sprang up to meet these

arrivals with the alacrity and deference which was the combination of manner that Mrs. Moulton liked. Florimel damaged the effect this time by overturning her chair and stepping on Chum's tail. Both chair and dog bounded as this happened and Chum howled, too newly adopted to be sure the injury was not intended.

"A dog, my dear?" asked Mrs. Moulton of Jane, at that moment kissing her cheek. But she looked beyond Chum at Mark, as being, in every sense, the larger object.

"Yes, Mrs. Moulton," said Jane, curbing her desire to laugh. "Florimel found it lost, and brought it home. We have adopted it as a friend; it seems to be obedient and good tempered." She flashed a look at Mark, calling upon him to appreciate this doubly accurate description. Her hair, ruffled by the breeze, seemed to flash with her eyes; it looked like a part of the afterglow in the west now illumining the garden.

"Dog!" said Mr. Moulton, who had not discovered Chum. "Looks like a boy to me, a boy I don't know." He peered at Mark through his large glasses.

Win presented Mark, instinctively feeling that it would incline Mr. and Mrs. Moulton more

favourably toward Mark if Win, and not the young girls, assumed the responsibility for him.

“Walpole, did you say?” Mrs. Moulton repeated after Win. “Mark Walpole? What was your father’s name? I knew of Walpoles in Massachusetts—what was your town?”

“Worcester, and my father’s name was Cathay. My grandfather was in India, and was pretty tired of it. He named my father Cathay because he felt as though he had been there a hundred years, had ‘a cycle of Cathay,’ you know. Hard on my father to get such a name, wasn’t it?” replied Mark.

“That’s the Walpole I meant!” Mrs. Moulton triumphed. “The very one! I didn’t know him, but a friend of my girlhood did; one couldn’t forget that name. Suppose you sit here and talk to me.” She led the way to a bench and motioned Mark to a place beside her.

“And suppose you sit *here* and talk to *me*!” echoed her husband, drawing a chair close to the one he took and inviting Mary to it. Mr. Moulton availed himself of most opportunities to appropriate Mary, his favourite of the three girls whom his friend had left to his guardianship, dear as they all were to him.

But the conversation did not divide itself off

into duets. Mr. Moulton ceased to draw from Mary her story of the doings of the Garden household since his last report, and Jane and Florimel, neither of whom was often silent, joined in listening to Mrs. Moulton's catechism of Mark and his answers.

"It isn't as if I were all right, you know," Mark said quietly, when he had told her of his aim to make his way in the world, though his hope of preparing to follow the course he would have chosen had been wiped out. "I'm lame. It doesn't bother me much, but it will probably get in the way of lots of things a sound boy might do. I got my foot smashed when I was a little chap and it couldn't be mended to be as good as new. But I'm sure I'll limp into something—something that will keep me out of the bread line!"

"Mark was telling me, Mr. Moulton," interposed Win, seeing his chance, "that he had gone quite far in botany, already he was planning to specialize in it, when he was thrown out of his own place in the world. I thought that would interest you."

"Why not?" said Mr. Moulton, turning from Mary to scrutinize Mark anew, scowling at him nearsightedly. "As to being thrown out of your

place in the world, my lad, there's no power on earth can play you that trick; it's every man's work to make the place he's in his own place. It's a consoling truth—and most absolutely a truth—that a man often grows bigger himself for having to fit himself to a smaller place than he had expected to fill. As to this ambition of yours interesting me, touch a man on his hobby and there is not much question of interesting him! I'm a botanist by choice and profession, though luckily for me I could afford to be! I live in spite of it, not by means of it. I'm working on a vast herbarium and a big book: 'A Study of the Flora of New York.' Now if you knew enough to help me—I'm not sure it would be just to your future, but—I could use a clever youngster who had what I'd call botanical common sense as well as sympathy. Come and see me to-morrow morning! I can measure you if I have you in my study, but not here. From the beginning a garden, a garden with even one girl in it, proved fatal to planning for a happy future!" Mr. Moulton twinkled behind his owl-like lenses. His wife arose to go.

"When Mr. Moulton becomes facetious I say good-night," she remarked. "I have a few chapters of my library book to finish before I

sleep. We came only to be assured the Garden children still blossomed. Fancy finding Cathay Walpole's boy here!" She arose with a rustling, impressive dignity, and her husband meekly arose also.

"Another reminiscence of that first garden—I do what the woman bids me," he said.

The three girls kissed both their guardian and his wife, and offered their own cool cheeks to receive their good-night kiss. Then they escorted them to the gate, while Win strolled beyond it with them, accompanying them home. Jane and Florimel joined hands and danced like nymphs up the walk. It was always a strain upon them to keep up to Mrs. Moulton's standards of propriety during one of their visits. Mary ran after the two, having lingered a little to say a last word to their old friends. Jane switched her skirts, held out in both hands, as she danced alone around the lawn. Florimel took Chum's forepaws and tried to get her to dance, but the big puppy growled a protest and Florimel gave it up.

"Chum knows the hesitation, all right," observed Mark.

Florimel caught Mary as she came and swayed her in a mad dance of her own devising.

"Mrs. Moulton knew your father! Mr. Moulton is going to love you for old botany's sake. I've been lucky fishing to-day!" Florimel chanted. "And to-morrow you'll go to see Mr. Moulton, and I'm going to give Chum a bath."

Mark laughed, and looked admiringly at her brilliant beauty.

"What is it about helping lame dogs over stiles? That's been your job to-day, Miss Gypsy Florimel!"

"We always have nice times," said Mary, as if good luck for Mark and rescue of Chum had been her personal gain. "Come into the house."

"Such a kindly, motherly house; I love it," said Mark.

"It's the greenhouse, you know, for us Garden slips, so it has to be warm and sort of hospitable," Jane reminded him.

They all passed in through the wide door, into the broad hall, and the light from the bend of the wide staircase fell on four happy young faces, and, Mark rightly thought, on three of the prettiest girls he had ever seen together.

"It's a lucky greenhouse with its specimens," he said shyly, but with a smile at Mary.

CHAPTER THREE

“A ROSEBUD SET WITH LITTLE WILFUL THORNS”

Jane was almost always the first of the Garden girls to come down in the morning. She was as full of moods, varying in light and shade, as the surface of a pool overhung with branches. Throughout some of her days she chattered and sang in the wildest of high spirits from dawn till dark. Again she fell into deep wells of silence where nothing could reach her; remote and inaccessible she wrapped herself in her own thoughts, refusing to amuse or to be amused on these days. Whatever her mood, after the spring had come she was faithful to her flower-bed in the garden. Mary worked in hers more steadily, Florinel with greater gusto—when she worked—but Jane gave her bed the place of a beloved volume of poetry, in which she read daily. When the birds and the eastern sky were tuning up together, in sound and colour, Jane sped lightly down the stairs and outdoors to look for overnight developments in her flowers and to sing above them.

"You sing to your posies for all the world the way the birds sing to waken the spring flowers!" Mary once said to her.

"If I'm a bird I'm a red-headed woodpecker, Molly darling, and he doesn't sing," retorted Jane, rumpling her brilliant locks.

The morning after Mark's arrival Jane's custom held good. Before any one else was downstairs she opened the door and went out into the fragrance and music of the late May morning, into the lovely old garden. Had there been any one there to see, they would have noticed that Jane wore her new brown street gown, not one of the simple chambreys in which she ordinarily said good-morning to her seedlings, who waited in bed for her coming—in fact, stayed in bed all day.

In a few moments there was some one to note this variation. Florimel followed Jane into the garden shortly, and instantly was upon her with an accusation.

"You're dressed up, Jane Garden; where're you going?" she cried.

"Florimel, don't speak so loud," Jane frowned at her. "I don't want Mary to know, not till I get back; of course I'll tell her afterward. I won't tell you where I'm going; then you can

truthfully say you don't know where I am when they ask."

"They won't get a chance to ask; I'm going with you," announced Florimel.

"Indeed you're not! You can't! I wouldn't mind, I'd like to have you, but you simply can't," declared Jane. "Don't be a nuisance and a baby, Mel; I can't let you go, or I would," she added out of her experiences in Florimel's possibilities.

"I simply will go, unless you tell me where it is you're going, and I see for myself I can't go or I don't want to," declared Florimel. "Of course that's plain silly, Jane. I can go wherever you go. If you tell me where it is and I do happen to stay at home I won't tell Mary or any one. But if you don't tell me I'll tell what you just said and get them all stirred up—Mary, Win, Anne, everybody. And you know what I say I'll do, I'll do."

Jane knew precisely this truth. "I can't take you, Florimel, because you're too young," she said unwisely.

"Two years and three months younger than you are!" interposed Florimel scornfully. "What's that!"

"A lot when I'm only fifteen," said Jane.

“I’m going before breakfast; I’ve had all I want out of the pantry. Well, then, Mel, I’ll tell you, but it’s on your word of honour not to say anything till I do—you promised!”

“Don’t I know I promised?” retorted Florimel. “And don’t you know wild horses and hot pokers couldn’t get me to tell, if I said I wouldn’t? Then hurry up!”

“I’ve always thought I had talent to act,” Jane announced. She continued, disregarding Florimel’s hastily stifled laughter: “I thought, maybe, I ought to go on the stage—of course not yet, but after I was, say three years older, and had studied for it. There’s a company in town now—acted in the Crystal Theatre last night. They are going away this morning on the 10.10. The leading lady’s name is Alyssa Aldine—I think Aldine always sounds like nice people; I suppose because the Aldine editions of books are so famous. Then I read such nice-sounding things about her in the *Vineclad Post* that I knew she wasn’t one of the ordinary actresses; she must be beautiful and clever. And it came to me like a flash that I would slip off early this morning, and get to the hotel before they leave, and ask to see Miss Aldine and get her to tell me frankly whether she thinks I ought

to go on the stage. A girl ought to try to find out just as early as she can what is her work in the world. I suppose I could recite and sing to Miss Aldine, if I had to, though I'd dread it. You see there aren't many chances to get good advice about the stage, here; it isn't often that talented, refined ladies come to Vineclad to act, they say."

Florimel had heard this speech of Jane's with utter amazement and disgust on her handsome face, which, childish though it was, was quite capable of expressing disgust with its black eyes and curling red lips.

"Well, Jane! Well, Jane *Garden*!" Florimel cried scornfully the instant Jane paused. "Talk about my being younger than you are! Why, you're a *baby*! Haven't you heard Win talk about the companies that come to the Crystal? One-night-stand companies, he says, that travel about in the country towns, are never any good! We never go. The idea of your going to call on this actress and asking her—well——" Florimel broke off, unable to express herself more satisfactorily.

"I told you, Florimel, that I read about Miss Aldine in the *Post* and she is *not* one of that ordinary kind," said Jane severely. "I *am*

going. It can't do any harm, and it may do good. Don't you tell Mary till I get back; don't tell her at all; I will. But you can't go with me."

"I can and I will," said Florimel in the tone which her family had learned to recognize as final. "I'm going to see you don't get kidnapped by these queer people. Take Anne, if you're bound to go! But you won't! So I'm going. I know you, Jane Garden. When you got there you'd double up, you'd be so scared. That's you all over, getting up some perfectly crazy idea like this and then all but dying doing it, when there never was the least bit of sense in doing it, anyway! I'll get a sandwich and my hat. Crazy Jane, that's what you are!"

Florimel walked off rigid with determination, excitement, and disapproval, leaving Jane with a sense of their youngest's competence, and relief that, after all, she was not going upon her adventure alone. Florimel returned with her sandwich and her hat disposed each in its proper place and manner. The sandwich had become plural; luckily the hat had not. "I put a scrawl on Mary's napkin telling her we had gone downtown on a secret errand, but would be back by ten," said Florimel. "Good thing I didn't run into Anne; she'd have been hard to quiet down.

You've got on your street suit, and I haven't, but I guess this is good enough."

"You look very nice in that green and white chambrey, Mel," said Jane meekly. And the sisters sallied forth by the side gate of the garden into the quiet, shaded street.

It was a long walk to the heart of the small town where stood the Waldorf, Vineclad's shabby and unique hotel, near the Crystal Theatre, which escaped by not much more than its name being merely a small town hall. Hollyhock House stood well beyond the collected business of Vineclad, out beyond the smaller homes of the place, built where acres for its setting and for its garden had been obtainable.

Jane and Florimel timed their progress to get to the hotel before eight, but they fell below their estimate of time required and got to the hotel somewhat before half-past seven.

"Good morning, young ladies," said the clerk, as the girls halted before his desk. "You are familiar to me, yet I cannot place you. What can I do for you? Are you denizens of our lovely town?"

"Yes," said Jane, without further enlightening him. "I want to see Miss Aldine, Miss Alyssa Aldine. She doesn't know me, but please

ask if I may see her—on business, important business.”

The clerk leaned over his desk as if to take the young girls into his confidence and Jane and Florimel fell back a few steps.

“Why, bless your lovely face and heart,” he said, “what time do you think the perfesh, which stop here, rises?—especially the lady perfeshes? Just in time to take the train! Just—barely—in—time—to—take—the—train, hustling!” He, too, fell back at this and regarded the girls triumphantly. “Breakfast in bed—also in curl papers—and a hustle to make the train. That’s the racket. Grand show last night; was you to it? Pity! Grand show. Now, I’ll tell you what to do. You go sit down comfortable in two of the Waldorf’s rockers, in the parlour, and wait calm and easy. And I’ll get a message up to Miss Aldine just’s soon as I think she will stand for it, and see if she won’t meet you. Peachy lady, she is, but I’ll tell her there’s two little girls here worth her looking at. Is that a go? Best I can do.”

“Thank you,” said Jane faintly, already dismayed by the unaccustomed atmosphere which she was breathing. “Yes, thank you; we’ll wait.”



““WHAT TIME DO YOU THINK THE PERFESH, WHICH STOP HERE, RISES?””

“It’s all right; it’s very early, earlier than we thought we’d get here. Don’t hurry,” Florimel supplemented Jane with decision. “For goodness’ sake, Jane, now you are here, don’t fade right out! Didn’t I say you’d be like that?” she added in a severe whisper as Jane and she followed their guide to the overwhelming red plush of the Waldorf parlour.

The time of waiting seemed desperately long to both girls. The grandfather clock ticking in the corner—it had been manufactured to sell with a large order of cigars in the most recent of periods—seemed to accomplish less by its seconds than any other clock Jane and Florimel had ever met. At last an hour passed, and twenty minutes followed it. Then the clerk returned with a smiling face and the important manner of a triumphant ambassador.

“You’re to come right up to her room,” he whispered, not because there was any one else there to hear, but because his words were too precious to be scattered broadcast. “I done my best for you, and she’ll see you.”

Jane and Florimel arose at once. Jane was so pale that the clerk noticed it. “Don’t be scared,” he advised her kindly. “She’s easy to get acquainted with.” He took the girls

up one flight of stairs and along a dusty corridor, carpeted in red and smelling of ancient histories.

"Here's the room!" announced the clerk, swinging around a right angle turn in the corridor and pausing before a door at the end of the wing thus reached. "Number 22!" he added, as if announcing the capital prize in a lottery. He knocked for the girls, seeing them overwhelmed, and withdrew with a wink that might have meant anything.

"Stay out!" cried a feminine voice.

Rightly construing this as humour, Jane timidly opened the door. She saw before her a blowsy looking woman, in a pink kimono, its thin quality and flowing amplitude, as well as its heavy, once-white lace trimming, adding to the extreme rotundity of its wearer. Her hair was in curl papers, her feet in soiled pink "mules." Beyond her sat a small woman, thin and tired looking, but animated, and still another with an indefinite face. Three men also adorned the room, all smoking; one of them was helping the indefinite woman to cram garments, that had not been folded, into a suitcase.

"Well, you pretty pair!" exclaimed the wearer of the pink kimono. "Say, Petey, what d'you

know about this? Some lookers to drop in at this hour in a deserted village, what?"

"Right-o! Nice little pair, eh, Nettie?" the man addressed threw the question back at the pink kimono; plainly this was their preferred way of conversing.

"May we—— Is Miss Aldine—— May we see Miss Aldine?" stammered Jane.

An exceedingly pudgy hand, decorated with several rings of great distinctness but little distinction, and souvenirs of buttered toast, dramatically struck the pink kimono where it was pinned together with a rhinestone bar.

"I am Miss Aldine—on the stage—Alyssa Aldine, leading lady of the comp'ny. In private I'm Mrs. Pete Mivle—he's Sydney Fleming on the stage, plays leadin' man to my heroines." Mrs. Mivle beamed proudly on her Pete; who assumed a look reminiscent of his more picturesque rôles and twirled his moustache with a hand upon which a diamond of at least three karats gleamed, genuine but yellowish.

"Got that off a chap that went stoney broke, at a bargain," he exclaimed, seeing Jane's eyes fastened upon it with what he took for awe.

"Say, what d'you want?" continued Miss Aldine, actually Mrs. Mivle, kindly, but in a

businesslike tone. "Not that we ain't pleased to death to see you, but you must of had an objec' in comin'—or was it for my autograph? Pete writes 'em."

"Oh, no!" cried Jane, dismayed to hear sounds in Florimel's throat that meant she was suffocating with laughter. "I came—I thought——" She stopped.

"Say it!" advised the small, thin woman who looked past forty, and who played the young girl parts in the company's repertory because of her diminutive size. "We've breakfasted; we won't eat you! Get it out of your system."

"I meant to ask your advice about studying for the stage," Jane said, by a supreme effort. "But there's no use troubling you; ever so much obliged."

"Cold feet so soon?" suggested Peter Mivle kindly. "Lots of kids get stage struck! If you wanted to follow the legitimate, we could use you. Of course you're too young, but there are ways of dodging the law. You'd make a great team, red and black, blond and brunette. Sisters?"

"Oh, no; I meant to study to be an actress when I'm older, if it was surely my proper

talent," said Jane. "Never mind; thank you ever so much."

Mrs. Mivle laughed. "Lady Macbeth and all that kind, eh?" she suggested. "We play old comedy and society plays, like 'East Lynne,' 'Ten Nights in a Bar Room,' and so on. Shakespeare's no good; we've got some funny ones, too. Take it from me, kid, it's hard work keepin' on the go every day, sleepin' in damp sheets and beds that are about as soft as coal beds half the time. One-night-stand companies don't find many snaps layin' along the tracks. And there ain't much in it. But we have good times enough together; no jealousy nor meanness in our gang. You drop the stage notion and trim hats! Easier, and you can stick to one boardin'-house and make good money. Ain't you two got a home, pretty girls like you? You'd think anybody'd have adopted 'em," she added, turning again to Peter.

"Oh, yes," cried Jane, "we have a lovely—a home. We—I mean I only wanted your advice——" She stopped again.

Florimel could not resist her temptation. "My sister thought perhaps she had so much talent for acting that it was her duty to go on the stage. She read about Miss Aldine in the

Vineclad *Post* and came to ask her advice, whether she thought she ought to study for the stage. That's all."

Florimel's eyes danced and Mrs. Mivle and the elderly actress of youthful parts twinkled back at her.

"The little one has the drop on you, my dear," Mrs. Mivle said joyously to Jane. "She's got practical sense. I guess you're up in the clouds; red-haired girls often are. But you've got hair that 'twould be worth being up into anything—or up *against* anything to have! If you've got a good home, what you botherin' about? Stick to it; that's what I say. I'm an artist all right, all right; you read what your paper says about me. But no art in mine, if I had the means to settle right down and bake pies like mother used to make. Must you go? Well, good-bye and good luck. So long! Hope to meet you again. Come see us act if ever we take in this town on this circuit again. We're the real thing, if I do say it!" The others of the company bade Jane and Florimel good-bye, shaking hands with them with the utmost cordiality, and Peter Mivle, or "Sydney Fleming," escorted them to the stairs.

Jane heard the laugh that arose behind them

in the room they had left, but she also heard "Miss Aldine" say heartily: "Perfect beauts, that's what!" And the voice of the little woman came out to them, saying pensively: "Oh, Nettie Mivle, ain't it fine to be young like that, and not acting it!"

Jane and Florimel walked swiftly out of the little hotel with the great name, escaping from the clerk's evident desire to learn the result of their call and its object, and from the idle lads who were gathering around the desk to see the actors, whose "show" they had seen the night before, come out and to compare actual appearances with those behind the footlights. The walk home was a silent one for Jane, but at intervals Florimel burst into laughter that was irresistible to passers-by and irrepressible to Florimel. Mary was busy when they came in, arranging the flowers which the garden yielded; not many yet in variety, but generous in quantity, even in May.

"Where can you two have been?" cried Mary, looking up with her sweet face smiling at them in a way that seemed to match the flowers beneath her cool finger-tips. "And so early? What are you up to, Garden girls? Have you had any breakfast, you rogues?"

“Oh, Mary, wait till you hear!” cried Florimel, throwing her hat in one direction and herself in another, on a chair. “We’ve been to see Miss Aldine; Jane wanted to be examined, but she changed her mind. Petey Mivle—that’s Sydney Fleming—said she——”

“Florimel, what can you be talking about?” cried Mary. “Who are all these people? Examined by whom, and for what?”

“Oh, I’ll tell you, Mary,” Jane took up the theme impatiently. “Florimel is so silly! Of course it was funny, only how was I to know Miss Aldine was Mrs. Mivle and that what the *Post* said wasn’t so?” Jane laughed at herself, her sense of humour too strong to allow her to feel annoyed with Florimel long.

“Positively I believe you’ve both gone crazy together, over night!” cried Mary. “Miss Aldine is Mrs. Mivle, you say? And Florimel is talking of ‘Petey Mivle’—like a schoolmate—and the *Post*—— Hurry the story!”

“Sit down, Mary, and I’ll harrow your young blood!” declared Jane, and forthwith gave her sister an account of her resolution to seek a great actress to ask advice on her career, and of the visit to the Waldorf. Jane told her story so well that Mary and Florimel and Anne, who had

come in to find out what her younger charges had been doing, were all three in convulsions. It might have warranted any one in thinking that Jane was right in considering the stage her vocation.

“Oh, me, oh, me!” sighed Mary, emerging from the sofa pillows into which she had helplessly fallen. “You do such mad things, Janie! And you are so wilful! You ought not to have started off alone on such an errand, to people you knew absolutely nothing about! Florimel is a headstrong child, but even she is more prudent. They must be kind people, if they are untidy, and flashy, and trashy! I’m glad they were so nice to you. Please, Jane, settle down and stop being restless-minded!”

“Can’t do it,” said Jane promptly. “I suppose there’s fire inside my head and the roots of my hair are in it. That’s why I’m always crackling off in explosions, and why my hair is red.”

“And I suppose we want you to be just what you are, if we tell the truth,” added Mary as she went out of the room. She could not bear to seem to criticise Jane or Florimel, being sensitively alive to a dread of hurting them, and conscious of the slight difference in their ages.

Florimel ran after Mary, and Anne Kennington turned to Jane.

"What put the stage into your head, Jane?" she asked. "Were you thinking of your mother? You don't look like her, but you are more like her, in some ways, than either of the others."

"My mother?" echoed Jane. "Mercy, no, Anne! Why should I?"

"Well, of course she did not go on the stage, yet singing is, in a way, like it," said Anne. "You know your mother was a singer and she couldn't keep away from the old life: singing, and applause, and all that, after she was a widow. You know she left you here to go back to it."

"Yes, I knew all that," said Jane slowly, "but I seem to have to try to know it; it isn't real to me. I never can make my mother real to me, Anne. You knew her. I wish you could make me feel what she was like."

"Knew her? I came over with her before she married and I stayed with her till she went back to England. She left me; never I her," said Anne warmly. "Just a slender bit of a thing was she, like a primrose, one that you couldn't help spoiling, such coaxing ways she had and such a pretty face, with a little droop of her shoulders and a fall in her voice as if she

begged a body to be good to her. I'd have cut off my head for her willingly. So I stayed, and did my best for her babies, without her."

"And what a best!" cried Jane, with a flashing look of grateful love. "Oh, I wish I had seen her! You make her a darling, Anne; just a sort of toy mother, to be petted and to be proud of! Why did she die, Anne? Do you know? No one ever told us; not even Mary knows about her death."

"I never heard one word about her dying, Jane; never the time, nor place, nor any syllable," said Anne truthfully. "I mustn't stand clacketing here any longer, Jane; I've more to do than I've minutes, though the good Lord gives to each of us all the time there is, if only we think about it."

Anne hastened away, and Jane walked over to the window, absently watching Mark Walpole returning from his call on Mr. Moulton, though without consciously seeing him, nor remembering that she had been deeply interested in the result of this visit.

"What a pretty little toy mother! How I wish I had her, or had even seen her!" thought Jane, swinging the shade pull. "And now Mary can't remember her more than as a shadow

before a mirror! Oh, little coaxing mother, I wonder why you left your three girl babies? Perhaps because you were only a girl yourself. But we lost something we can never get back."

CHAPTER FOUR

“HOME AT EVENING’S CLOSE,
TO SWEET REPAST AND CALM REPOSE”

Mark Walpole came up the walk at a rapid gait, swinging one arm and breathing through his puckered lips as though he were whistling, though the tune of it was in his mind only; no sound came forth. Mary met him at the door with her pretty air of self-forgetfulness and absorption in others, the manner that was all Mary’s, as if she were an anxiously motherly old lady and, at the same time, a childishly innocent young girl.

“You were gone a long time; was it a nice visit?” she asked.

“Great!” cried Mark, in a tone that left no doubt of his sincerity. “Such a collection as Mr. Moulton has made! I never saw plants pressed and preserved like his. He says he has discovered a trifling secret, but a big one, that makes his specimens less brittle. And his book is all right, too! He is writing from a new angle.

I don't see how he will ever finish it. Maybe some younger man will carry it on. That's what he said. He said he'd be relieved to know there was some one to keep on with it if he dropped out, some one who understood his ideas thoroughly. It would mean a lot to fit one's self to carry on this really great book, but maybe if I did my best——" Mark left his sentence unfinished.

Mary caught at its meaning eagerly. "Then Mr. Moulton does want you to help him?" she cried. "You did get on well with him?"

Mark grinned, with a boyishly sheepish look of satisfaction. "As to that, he was awfully nice and kind, in a gruff way that I liked—after I caught on to his methods. And I got so wound up over his specimens and the book plans that—well, I guess he saw I wasn't faking it, for he thawed right out. He's going to take me on as a—I don't know what you would call it—amanuensis, or secretary, but, thank goodness, it's more than that, because I'm to help with the work, if I know enough; not merely copy and put notes in order."

Mary laughed delightedly, clasping her hands before her in an ecstatic little way that she had, as if she were congratulating herself on being glad.

“You look like another boy!” she cried. “Isn’t it fine? I’m almost as glad as you are! Mr. Moulton is a dear, the dearest of dears, but he has to be found out—like gold and jewels! And his wife is another dear. I know you will be happy, and the greatest comfort to Mr. Moulton; he’s been longing for a helper. Isn’t it fine!”

“You girls and your unc—and Win did it. Florimel made me come home with her, and you’ve all been great to me! I’m awfully grateful, though I can’t say so as I want to, Miss Gard—well, then, Mary!” Mark corrected himself, as Mary shook her head at his relapse into forbidden formality. “But ‘Miss Guard’ suits you to a T! I’m not sure I shan’t call you Miss Guard; you certainly mother this house, if you *are* younger than I am.”

“She smothers the house,” Jane corrected him, entering that moment. But she swung Mary off her feet in a rapid hug to illustrate her actual meaning.

“What’s happened?” cried Florimel, dashing in from the garden. Chum bounded after her; she had lost every remnant of doubt as to the sort of home she had found; indeed her manner conveyed that she had owned the house first

and had kindly allowed the Gardens to use it. Florimel's skirt was torn and she and Chum left loam tracks wherever they stepped, which seemed to be everywhere. But Chum's expression was so foolishly blissful, and Florimel's brilliant beauty was so irresistible, that Mary stifled her impulse to protest and beamed on the youngest Garden and the dog, inwardly resolving to repair damages before busy Abbie could see them.

"What'd he say?" panted Florimel, jumping up and down in front of Mark, whose success or failure she considered her own particular affair.

"He said we'd have a trying time, Florimel," replied Mark, laughing at her. "He'd try me and I'd try him, and if the trial proved me competent, he'd take me into his tent and be content; but if trying me proved too trying he'd not try to try me any longer!"

"For pity's sake!" cried Florimel, shaking Mark's arm. "My head feels like a snarl of wool! What do you mean, anyhow? What did Mr. Moulton say, Mary?"

"Mark is going to help him, Mel," said Mary. "I'm sure it is going to be the best thing that ever happened; I'm as happy as I can be about

it. Did you know you had torn your skirt, dear? And it's a new one."

"I rolled over on it, Mary, too tight—I mean the skirt was pulled down under me tight when I fell over. I was sitting on my heels, weeding. And Chum thought it was a joke and ran over to bite and yank me, so I kicked out, quite hard, I suppose, because I heard that tearing, crashing sound that you read about in stories of ships striking icebergs, and when I looked——" Florimel ended her account of the disaster with a dramatic gesture downward.

"Make her mend it herself, Mary, and then wear it; she tears everything, and you mend and mend for her, and never scold her!" said Jane, frowning because Mary smiled when she should have frowned at careless Florimel.

"Certainly I shall mend it!" said Florimel, who had never been known to repair anything she had torn. "When I went with you to call on your friend, Miss Aldine, Jane, I decided to begin to mend the very first time anything happened to me! Then if Mary were sick I could mend for you, when you went on the stage, if that sloppy lot were the way you'd have to be. It was what Mrs. Moulton calls an object lesson to me."

Jane coloured with annoyance over this allusion, but could not help laughing at the look Florimel gave her out of her dancing black eyes, her rosy face pulled down to severity as she spoke.

"It's a precious good thing I let you go with me, Miss, if it was an object lesson and makes you spare poor Mary some of your mending," she retorted. "There's the telephone; I'll answer it."

At the end of the hall Jane took down the receiver and they heard her say: "Yes. No, it's Jane. Oh, Mr. Moulton, I didn't know your voice. How funny it sounds. Have you a cold? That's good, but your voice sounds husky and queer, as if it didn't work right. Yes, sir; we're all here. You'll be over in about an hour? All right, Mr. Moulton; good-bye. They're coming over, Mr. and Mrs. Moulton," Jane said, rejoining her sisters. "He says he has something most important and unexpected to tell us. He sounded so queer! If it had been one of us I'd have said he was excited."

"No, you wouldn't," observed Mark. "You'd say *she* was excited."

"Oh, dear me," sighed Jane. "Nothing worse than fussy people! Maybe I wouldn't; maybe

Win would have been home, or you here, and I'd still have said he. Coming with me to get ready to see the Moultons, Marygold? They'll be here so late we shall have to get dressed for supper before they come."

"Yes. Florimel, if Mrs. Moulton saw you wearing that torn skirt I don't know what might happen to her," said Mary, joining Jane at the foot of the stairs.

"She'll see me wearing a whole skirt. Wait till I put Chum out," said Florimel.

Mary and Jane did not take Florimel's "wait" literally. They knew that putting Chum out could hardly be called putting—it involved long coaxing and wiles, and feigned enthusiasm and excitement over a cat in the garden, which had no existence there or elsewhere. So the two older girls went on up to their rooms, leaving Florimel to the persuasion of Chum.

"What do you say it is?" asked Jane a little later, standing in Mary's chamber door, her radiant hair falling over her white skirt and flying around her face in a glory to which Mary never became thoroughly accustomed. Jane was drying her face as she spoke; she never could be kept in the proper spot long enough to finish any part of her toilet. Mary was bent over,

combing up the heavy masses of her own soft brown hair. She looked up from under it at Jane's reflection in the mirror.

"What do I suppose *what* is?" Mary asked.

"What Mr. Moulton has to tell us, of course," said Jane. "I've been thinking. He's our guardian, you know, so I think it's one of two things: Either we are a great deal poorer than we are supposed to be, or a great deal richer. His voice certainly sounded excited; the more I think of it the surer I am that Mr. Moulton's voice was queer. When guardians in books have anything to tell their wards it is something about money, so I suppose we're beggared, or else——"

"We're not!" Mary ended Jane's sentence for her with a laugh. "Just like the effect of the White Knight's poem, which either brought tears to your eyes or it didn't! Janie, you're the greatest goose—for a duck! You're precisely like the heathen imagining vain things! Mr. Moulton probably wants to talk about naming a plant for one of us; he's been talking about that ever since he began experimenting with those hybrids of his, which are going to produce a new flower."

"You'll see!" said Jane, throwing out her

hair and running her fingers through it till it crackled and followed them, standing out around her.

"Jane," protested Mary, "go away! You make me think of the burning bush and 'the pillar of fire by night,' till I feel quite wicked and irreverent."

Instead of going away Jane came over and kissed Mary in the hollow of the back of her neck: "If I could make you feel wicked, you old lump of goodness, you, I'd follow you around every minute. 'Tisn't fair that Mel and I have all the Garden badness—all the weediness," she declared.

Just as Mary and Jane ran downstairs, both fresh and lovely in pale lawns, Win came in at the front door.

"What's up?" he asked at once. "Mr. Moulton telephoned the office for me to be home early, that he was coming here to tell us all something, and would like me to be here, if I could be. What's up?"

"We don't know," began Mary, slightly disturbed, feeling that this must portend more than the naming of a new hybrid. Jane took the words out of her mouth. "We don't know," she said, "but I'm sure that we have had a lot

of money come somehow, or else we're so poor, everything swept away, that we've got to be cash girls, at four dollars a week."

"Too much," said Win, shaking his head. "Red-haired girls at three-fifty; that's the rule."

"They're coming, anyway, Mr. and Mrs. Moulton are coming," Florimel called over the banisters as she hurriedly buttoned her waist in the back and pulled it down into place after she had done this. "We'll soon know what it is. Mother was English, wasn't she? Maybe we're earls, I mean dukes, duchesses—oh, noble!"

"We are noble, Mel," said Win gravely; "very noble. If we weren't noble, my dear, we should long ago have dealt with you as you deserve."

Mark was nowhere to be seen, though he was staying this second night in Hollyhock House, having arranged to begin his service to Mr. Moulton on the next day.

"He's a nice boy to take himself off, but Mr. Moulton can't have anything to say that any one might not hear," said Win, going out to meet the visitors. Yet when Win came back, stepping aside to allow the girls' guardian to precede him into the house, there was an instant perception of something out of the ordinary on the

part of the three Garden girls. It was so strong that it was as if they had not thought of it before; Mr. Moulton's face was quite red, his manner distinctly nervous, and his wife looked greatly disturbed. Mary found it difficult to greet them, while Jane, who was like an electrical wire in receiving impressions, turned pale and put out her hand to her old friends without speaking.

"My dears," Mr. Moulton began, having cleared his throat portentously, "I have an extraordinary announcement to make to you; nothing bad, so don't be frightened, but it will certainly amaze you. I don't know how to begin. Do you know your mother's name?"

"There!" exclaimed Florimel involuntarily. "Jane said it was money, but I knew it was the nobility!"

"Lynette Devon, wasn't it, Mr. Moulton?" said Mary, with a reproving glance at Florimel.

"Lynette Devon was her maiden name," assented Mr. Moulton, glancing at his wife, who sat nervously on the edge of her chair, as if prepared to render any sort of aid to any one instantly. "You never heard of the manner nor time of her death, did you?" Mr. Moulton went on. "No!" he added as the three girls shook

their heads and Mary clasped her hands quickly and gasped: "Oh, Mr. Moulton!"

"No, you never did. The impression that she was dead has been intentionally given you, because it was the kindest thing to do to keep you from worrying and longing to get in touch with her. But, my dears, your mother is not dead."

The three girls sat in utter silence for a few moments after this announcement. Mary, white to the lips, clasped and unclasped her hands, looking imploringly at Mr. Moulton with her lovely brown eyes as prayerful as a dog's. Florimel seemed dazed, and Jane, alarmingly white and thin looking—Jane had a trick of looking thin under emotion—suddenly dropped over on the arm of her chair and shook with dry sobs. Win sat silent, looking rather stern.

"We do not understand," Mary managed to whisper at last.

"Win remembers her; he was eleven years old when she went away." Mr. Moulton halted again over the beginning of his story.

"He never talked about her to us," said Mary reproachfully.

"I know," assented Mr. Moulton, watching his wife as she vainly tried to calm Jane, and finally went quietly to find Anne Kennington

and ask for aromatic ammonia. "Win had a boy's resentment against his sister-in-law for leaving you, and for leaving him, also. He was fond of her and bitterly resented her 'deserting you,' as he called it. I used to try to reconcile Win and teach him to judge Mrs. Garden gently, but he was too young to learn charity. He helped me to keep from you younger children the fact that she was alive—which he has not suspected, I know—by believing that she had died, and asking no questions." Mr. Moulton smiled at the bewildered young man, who was not less stunned than the girls by this information. "Jane, my dear, try to control yourself. There is nothing about finding one's mother alive to cry over, and I want you to hear what I say," said Mr. Moulton, with better effect on Jane's nerves than his wife's prescription. Jane stood in awe of her guardian.

"Your mother, my dears, was married young. It was not so young that she had not tasted the delight of holding an audience by her charming voice—she sang like the linnet she was called—and by her remarkable talent for mimicry. She was the best mimic I ever heard; she could burlesque anybody, and imitate almost any

sound. She was a great pet with audiences over in England, when she married an American, considerably her elder—your father and my friend. He took her away from her audiences and her country and set her down in the old Garden house amid the old Garden garden. Here you, her three babies, were born in four years. I knew Lynette as well as a sober codger like me could know such a radiant creature, but I never knew whether or not she longed for her professional life. Then, your father dead, Florimel a baby of a year, she suddenly announced that she could bear it no longer, but must return to her singing and entertaining. I was your guardian, children; Anne was devotion to you incarnate; your mother knew that she was leaving her babies to absolute safety, better care than most mothered babies get. Of course no one else can understand how the old life could call her with half the force your baby voices would have to hold her. Mrs. Moulton has never understood it.” Mr. Moulton glanced at his wife, who looked grimly at him in return. “I don’t understand it myself, but Lynette Devon loved her old life and she was unable to resist its lure. She went back, and all these past twelve years, while you have thought her dead,

she has been entrancing the English public, quite as great a success as before her marriage."

Mary looked at her guardian, her eyes so full of appeal that he paused.

"What is it, Mary, dear?" he asked.

"Nobody has been blaming our mother all this time, have they? She is——" Mary could not frame her question.

"She is an artist, Mary, and everything she does is worth doing, if that is what you would like to ask," Mr. Moulton assured her. "She sings good music and does clever entertaining; every one praises her. She is a child and an artist; she could not be domestic, and, as long as her babies were comfortable and safe, she saw no reason why she should deny her nature and stay here. We cannot understand that——"

"Yes, I can!" Jane interrupted him to cry. "I couldn't leave an animal to suffer, but I can see why she had to go back. Isn't it *wonderful*, Mary?"

"Ah, but, Jane, here's the hard part of it!" said Mr. Moulton. "You see her days of giving and getting joy in her own way were not long. Lynette is only thirty-seven now, and, though that may sound decrepit to you, it is young. And your mother's voice is gone, her career

ended. She caught a severe cold, was seriously ill for some months this last winter, and when she recovered it was but a partial recovery—her beautiful voice was completely gone. So now she is laid on the shelf. She wrote to me——”

“She wants to come home!” cried Mary, starting to her feet, and Jane and Florimel were on theirs as quickly.

“Sit down, children; she is not outside,” smiled Mr. Moulton. “She wrote me that ‘if her little girls were not angry with her for having cast them off for her career, if they would receive her, now that her career was ended and she had nothing but them to turn to, she would like to come here.’ She added that she realized that it had a contemptible look to turn to her children only when nothing else was left, but she wanted them now, and hoped that they would forgive her. She also said, quite simply and, I think, sincerely, that she ‘had to go.’”

“When will she get here?” cried Mary, still clasping and unclasping her hands, still white to the lips.

“Will any one have to go to get her?” demanded Jane. “I’ll go.”

“Oh, say, couldn’t she take an airship and

hurry?” burst out Florimel, her face crimson with impatient excitement.

“If she needs an escort over, I could start Saturday, if they’d give me two weeks out of the office now, instead of a summer vacation,” added Win.

“She will come with her maid, if you invite her,” said Mr. Moulton. “She is not poor; Mrs. Garden is really rather a wealthy woman, I imagine. It is not because she needs support that she wants to come.”

“Of course not; she needs us, her daughters!” cried Mary.

“And we need her, if only to pet,” Jane supplemented her.

“I am bound to tell you one thing, my dears,” said Mr. Moulton. “You are free to do precisely as you wish in the matter. There were some of us who would not accept the responsibility for you—myself and some of the Gardens—unless we were to have it completely. When your mother went back to England, leaving you here, Florimel still a baby, you know, she signed an agreement to relinquish all claim upon you and upon this estate. She has no legal claim upon you. I am bound to tell you that.”

“As though one remembered law about one’s mother!” cried Jane, losing all hold on words.

“Specially when she’s lost her voice and needs us,” said Florimel.

“She could not alter things with pen and ink, Mr. Moulton,” said sweet Mary. And Mr. Moulton drew her to him and kissed her.

“Such true little girls!” he said. “What’s a voice and the public to lose if the loss gains you three?”

CHAPTER FIVE

“SWEET AS ENGLISH AIR COULD MAKE HER”

It was long before the Garden household settled down to sleep that night.

The girls had walked with Mr. and Mrs. Moulton part of the distance toward their home. In answer to Florimel's question, Mr. Moulton had said that he was sure that Mrs. Garden would be established at home in less than a month. When Jane pressed him for a right to hope for her coming in less time, he admitted that it was quite possible that she would be in Vineclad within three weeks, as he meant to write to her that night.

“And tell her not to bring a maid, not unless she thinks she can't possibly get on without her. We want to be her maids; please tell her that, Mr. Moulton,” Jane implored him.

“Very well, Jane. Your mother has undoubtedly been accustomed to a great deal of waiting upon; remember that you children may not have much leisure this summer for your outdoor

pleasures if you do not let your mother have her maid," Mr. Moulton suggested.

"Of course we can find one here, later," said Mrs. Moulton, seeing the protest in the three pairs of eyes turned upon them.

"And if you had a mother indoors, one you thought was dead, you wouldn't want to go out at all, would you?" cried Florimel.

"That's what we all feel," said Mary.

"Why, since I've heard she was alive, and I've got so I could think of it, I'm just *hovering* over my mother!" cried Jane. "It's as though my mind fluttered over her, the way birds flutter over their nests; it can't get away."

"It's curious, isn't it, when we were so happy before and loved one another almost more than any other three sisters ever did, that the moment you said our mother was alive it was as if all our life backward looked empty? We all three knew in an instant that we needed something terribly," Mary said thoughtfully.

Mrs. Moulton glanced at her husband. "Be prepared, my dears, for not finding your mother quite like the mothers you know in Vineclad," she said. "She has had slight experience in motherhood, and she has been the pet of a large public. It is quite possible that you may be

called upon to mother her, rather than find her knowing how to mother you. But you are all three capable of this, each in her way."

Then Jane replied with one of her flashing intuitions: "We'll mother her until she learns how to have daughters."

The three Garden girls turned back at this point, after Mary had received from Mr. Moulton instructions for sending Mark Walpole to him in the morning, and Mrs. Moulton had listened, with her quietly amused smile, to Mary's hints of her discoveries in regard to Mark's tastes.

"Win and I think he needs watching; he gets into day dreams and doesn't look after himself very well," Mary ended. And the girls bade the Moultons good-bye and turned toward home.

"Such a born little mother as sweet Mary is," said Mrs. Moulton warmly, as she and her husband watched the slender figures running toward home like swift Atalantas. "Such a wonderfully beautiful, clever, and lovable trio! What daughters for a real mother to return to! And I have none."

"Now, Althea, those children are almost your own," said her husband hastily, for he never wanted his wife to remember that their

one little daughter had lived but a few months. "And perhaps Lynette Garden will appreciate them. Twelve years is a long time. Lynette was no older than Win is now when she went away; she must have changed."

"She was a pretty little Angora kitten," said Mrs. Moulton, walking on. And her husband knew that Mrs. Garden's defence must be left to herself when she came. Mary, Jane, and Florimel ran into the house and up the stairs to the sewing-room, calling: "Anne, Anne!" as they came.

Anne opened the door to them. They saw at a glance that she was idle, an almost unprecedented discovery, and her face was darkly flushed and swollen with tears.

"You know!" cried Mary, throwing herself into Anne's open arms.

"Win told me," said Anne, holding Mary, dearest to her of the sisters, if she had a preference. "I have always wondered how this day would come, and when."

"You knew our mother was alive, and never told us!" cried Jane.

"Janie, I've written her at odd times, telling her how you got on; she asked me to when she went away. What was the use of telling you

she was alive? You could not have been with her, and you would have fretted after her. You might have come not to love her if you were wanting her and could not get her to come to you, nor take you there. It was better to let you grow up contented; Mr. and Mrs. Moulton were strict in requiring me to keep still. But I always knew this day would come. She'll be here soon, my little lady, and what a happy time it will be!" Anne poured out her words with profound emotion.

"Oh, Anne, yes! What a happy time it will be! What a happy time it is!" cried Mary. "We shall have all we can do to get ready for her. Do you think the house has to be repaired? Do we have to get new furniture, do you think? And what room shall she have?"

"You know, Mary, the big south room was the room she used to have," said Anne. "That is why I kept it for a guest-room: I thought she'd be back one of these days and it would be best for her to slip into her old place. You three babies were born in that room and there she used to rock you, the short time that she had you to rock. Florimel she enjoyed but a year. I can see her this minute with that black-haired midget in her arms, and you and Jane playing

beside her; Florimel's hair was black and plenty from the first! The small room off it was her dressing-room."

"You've often told us, Anne," said Jane. "Do you think it needs doing over?"

"I'd rather the old furniture was there for her to see," said Anne. "Of course the paper she had is gone and what's there is faded. I've a piece of her wall paper in the garret. Why not send it to one of the big dealers in New York and see how near he can come to matching it? I believe the nearer like the way she found her room when the doctor had it ready for her, and brought her to it, only three years older than her oldest girl is now, the more like that she finds it now the less she'll feel that you three tall creatures are not the babies she left behind her."

"Oh, dear; I'm so sorry we are so near grown up!" sighed Mary.

"But she did leave us, and stayed twelve years. She can't expect to find us just learning to walk!" exclaimed Florimel, who was more inclined to remember that this fabulous mother had gone away from her children than was either of the others.

The next morning Mark went to begin his labours with Mr. Moulton. The Garden girls

were so interested in his installation that this would have been an absorbing event had it not been that Jane was in the library, occupied with wrapping and addressing a large strip of the paper which had been on her mother's room when she came to it, a bride, and Mary and Florimel were upstairs turning the room topsy-turvy, deciding what changes to make in its furnishing.

"We're going to keep this low rocker because our mother held us in it when we were babies," Mary announced when Mark came upstairs to look for her and say good-bye. "Don't you think it would be fine to have the chairs cushioned with a very good chintz, to harmonize with the wall paper? Do you like that table exactly? Are you really going now to Mr. Moulton, Mark? Of course you are; I'm dazed. Please don't mind. No, we won't say good-bye here; we're going down to see you out of the door, though of course you will come through it nearly every day this summer. But we must see you go to seek your fortune, and wish you luck. I've waked up at last! When you came upstairs I couldn't seem to understand why you came, or anything!"

"I know; you looked right through me, all

the way across the ocean to England,” laughed Mark. “I didn’t know you could talk so fast, Mary! I don’t mind your forgetting me. It’s a big thing that’s happened to you, and I’m a good deal stirred up, myself, to think you’ve found out your mother’s alive and is coming back. I know how I’d feel if I could hear my mother hadn’t died, though I never knew my mother, either. But I knew my father; we were chums.”

“What a nice boy you are, Mark Walpole!” said Mary, frankly holding out her hand. “This is another bit of luck this spring! I’m glad we’ve found you for a friend.”

“*We’ve* found him! H’m!” said Florimel, with a withering scorn that might have withered more effectually if her face had been less dusty from rubbing it with hands that had been pushing against backs of pieces of furniture. “I guess no one found him but me—in the bulrushes down in town! I wish your name was Moses, Mark; it would be so funny and fitting.”

“I believe I’d just as lief have a name that isn’t so close a fit to that one incident, Florimel. Maybe Mark will fit something else that happens to me; it sounds like a name that could come in pat,” said Mark.

"Of course!" cried Florimel. "You'll discover some old weed, or something, in botany, and make your mark! But I'd love to call you Moses."

"You may, Pharaoh's daughter. I don't mind. But I can't crave to be called that by every one," said Mark, and turned back at the foot of the stairs to put out his hand to Mary. "Even if I am going to see you again this evening, and nearly every day, I believe the time to thank you is when I start out on my own hook. I can't do it," he said. "You've been no end good to me, and if I didn't know that so well, I could say it better."

"Please never say it nor think it," said Mary. "You came along and the rest of it followed you. It did itself. I love to believe everything flows along, like little waves, one after another!—planned for us, you know."

"Good-bye, Mary Garden. I'd like any plan that had you in it," said Mark hurriedly, as if he hated to say it.

"Mark is nice; he's gone, Jane," said Mary, coming in to where Jane was busily writing the wall paper firm about the paper.

"Where has he gone?" asked Jane absently, and they both laughed. "You can't expect me

to remember such a little thing as Mark's going when our mother is coming," Jane added. "He'll be here every spare minute, anyway."

For two weeks Hollyhock House spun out of all likeness to its calm self. The New York dealer had furnished a paper for the south bedroom that differed only in a small detail from the sample which Jane had mailed him. Paper hangers, painters, and upholsterers worked steadily to restore the room to the appearance it had worn eighteen years before. The odour of paint dominated the early June odours, which crept in from the garden, and the bustle, untidiness, and confusion of workmen in the house left little time or thought for the loveliness which, this year, as in all years, the beautiful garden offered its young owners.

But at last the south chamber was done. It shone in the whiteness of its new paint, and blossomed, a rival to the garden, in its new wall paper, with apple blossoms rioting everywhere between its floor and ceiling. The low rocker in which, seventeen years ago, the girl mother had stilled her first baby, Mary, was covered in a chintz of browns and greens and pinks, repeated on the seats of the other chairs. Delicate curtains of point d'esprit fluttered from beneath the

same shades in raw silk outer curtains. Mary had worked steadily, and Jane had helped her, to hemstitch new dresser and table covers of the finest linen, not because there was not already a store of such things in the house, but because they were eager to prepare with their own fingers these special belongings for their mother's room. When everything was done there followed five long-drawn days of waiting. Mr. Moulton had received a cablegram that Mrs. Garden had sailed. She had asked the children not to meet her. Mr. Moulton went alone to New York to be there when she arrived and to bring her home.

Waiting had been hard from the moment that the accomplishment of the work in the house left nothing more to be done, except to wait. After Mr. Moulton had gone it became unbearable.

"Suppose she missed the boat!" said Florimel, wriggling about in her chair on the piazza.

Mary and Jane laughed, but Jane said: "To tell the truth, I can't help being scared to death for fear there's been a collision and the ship's sunk."

"We'd hear that at once," said Mary. "What I've been thinking is that she might have been taken ill and died on the way over."

"Well, girls!" remonstrated Win. "I'd never have believed you'd have been breaking your necks to cross a bridge you hadn't come to like this! It isn't like you to imagine such catastrophes."

"We never had a mother coming home before," Florimel reminded him. "We never had a mother anywhere," added Jane. "It doesn't seem possible we can have one."

"If she doesn't get in to-morrow, the ship will be overdue; to-morrow's the latest date for her. When ships are overdue, there's always something wrong, isn't there, Win?" asked Mary apprehensively.

"There's always something wrong with people who worry, when worry is not due, Molly darling," Win reminded her. He had been thinking for a moment or two that he saw a carriage appear and disappear down the road, revealed and concealed by its turns. Now it came into sight, approaching.

"Oh, Mary—Win!" gasped Jane, springing out of the hammock where she had been lying, so pale that Mary was forced to notice it in the midst of her answering excitement.

"Steady, kids!" murmured Win sympathetically, as the carriage stopped at the gate.

Florimel uttered a queer cry and bolted into the house. Mary, as white as Jane, moved forward as if in a dream, and Jane followed her; Win brought up the rear. A lady got out of the carriage; neither girl saw her clearly. They received an impression of an elusive perfume, soft fabrics, a vivid, tender face, and arms encircling them in turn; while a voice, most lovely in tone and quality, as soft and hauntingly sweet as the fabrics and the fragrance, said with an English accent:

“Oh, not really! I’m going back! Not such tall, tall girls my daughters! You make an old woman of me on the instant! Where’s the other one? I know Jane by her hair; so you are Mary. And Win! Grown up—but you are older than the girls; that’s a comfort. Oh, my dears, I’m so tired! Do you think you can give me tea? I still feel that wretched boat tossing; we had a rough crossing. Have you my veil, Mr. Moulton? Ah, yes; thanks. Fancy your being so grown and so pretty, children! Thank goodness, you’re decidedly pretty, though too pale. I wonder why America bleaches its girls?”

“Our girls are as rosy as you could ask, Mrs. Garden,” Mr. Moulton came to the rescue as Mrs. Garden’s lovely voice ceased; neither Mary

nor Jane had spoken. "They are overwhelmed by seeing you. I told you what it meant to them to have you return to them from the dead—as they thought."

"Naturally!" said Mrs. Garden, pressing the arm that happened to be nearest to her—Jane's. "And fancy what it means to me to see you again, my dears! I should have written you, but your guardian and Anne Kennington forbade me. They thought it would make you quite too unhappy to be separated from me, knowing me alive. I dare say they were right. I positively could not have you with me, going about as I did. Oh, children, pity your little mother! Her voice is gone!"

"Indeed we are sorry, mother, darling," said Mary, finding her own voice in response to the appeal in her mother's. "But we can't be as sorry as we would like to be because its going meant your coming—home."

"That's a nice little speech, Mary," said her mother. "I'm glad you know how to say pretty things. It's a great gift for a woman to say the right thing at the right moment."

"Mary does not make pretty speeches, Mrs. Garden. She says the right thing because she feels the right way," said Win, flushing.

"How nice! She looks like a darling girl; she's quite as sweet looking as she is pretty," said Mrs. Garden, as though Mary were not there. "But, Win, *Mrs. Garden*? Aren't you half-brother-in-law to me? Why not Lynette?"

"Yes," said embarrassed Win. "That's so!"

By this time they had come up the path and entered the house. At the door stood Anne, tears streaming down her face.

Mrs. Garden flew to her. "You dear creature!" she cried. "How glad I am to find you waiting for me, exactly where I said good-bye to you twelve years ago! And the house looks just the same! How strange, when one has been living so eagerly as I have, to come back and find a place looking as though a day had hardly gone by since one left it! But the children spoil that effect! Dear me, Anne, why have they grown to be almost young women? It's dismaying. Where is the baby, Florimel? The one I named, and who has the only pretty name among them, in consequence? She could not walk when I left her; can't she walk now, and come to welcome me?"

"Mel! Florimel, come!" called Jane up the stairs, as Florimel emerged, as pale as her sisters, from the folds of a portière.

“Oh, you charming gypsy!” cried her mother, taking her into her arms. “You had this same raven hair when we first met, and you were an hour old. You are nearly as tall as Mary, and you are both as tall as if I were decrepit! Isn’t it horrible? And at home in England I’ve been singing under my maiden name, and quite felt, and was treated, like a young Miss Lynette Devon! Never mind, my sweethearts, I’ve come back to be an old woman, and to let you take care of me.”

“You’ll never be an old woman, and we’ll take care of you so that you’ll feel like a whole orphan asylum!” cried Florimel, characteristically able to express what Mary and Jane felt too deeply to utter.

“You dear funny child! Is there tea, Anne? I’m half dead from fatigue. And send a maid out to fetch my portmanteau, will you? My luggage will be here to-morrow, but I want to go right to my room, and get into a loose gown I’ve kept with me, just as soon as I’ve had tea,” said Mrs. Garden.

“Win has brought your bag in, mother: I slipped out to see,” said Mary. “He’s taken it to your room. Abbie is bringing you tea and a cracker and some crisp lettuce out of the garden.”

“Is that fine garden as good as ever? A *cracker*, my American daughter? We say biscuit at home. But what a dear little caretaking creature you are! I did not like your name; I was awfully vexed that the doctor insisted on calling you after one of the Gardens—his aunt, wasn’t it? I was going to name you Elaine; then we both should have been called out of the Idyls of the King, you know. But it turned out quite right; you’re a genuine English Mary, sweet, old-fashioned kind. And my pretty Jane—do you know that lovely old tenor song? Jane would have been Gwendoline if I’d had my way, but she got called after her grandmother. I had my way with Florimel, and none other! However, Jane is so brilliant and clever looking that Jane is rather nice for her; the plain name emphasizes her. Ah, thank you—Abbie, did you say, Mary? Thank you, Abbie. I’m half dead, and the tea smells perfect.” Mrs. Garden accepted the cup which Mary poured for her, and the lettuce that Jane eagerly served her, also the “biscuit” that Florimel passed. The three girls hovered around her, silent but alert, their pallor now giving way to a flooding colour which enhanced the beauty of their sparkling eyes.

“My word!” said their mother, looking from one to the other as she sipped her tea. “Am I really your mother, my three tall princesses?”

Anne stood gloating over her lady, whose absence she had ceaselessly mourned. Mrs. Garden’s children had recovered enough by this time to see that she was exceedingly slender, with a willowy grace of motion that gave her five feet two of height the effect of more inches. Her face was long and thin, delicately formed. Jane was more like her than either of the others, though in expression, as in colouring, they were unlike. Mrs. Garden’s hair was a light brown, her eyes were blue, her nose as pretty as possible, straight and fine. Her mouth was small and pretty in shape as in expression. Though she never could have been as lovely as Mary, for she lacked Mary’s earnest eyes and the reposeful strength which supplemented her prettiness; though Jane and Florimel both far outshone her in beauty, yet Mrs. Garden must have been at their age a remarkably pretty girl, with a childish appeal, and a little manner that demanded and inspired service from all of her world. To her children she looked older than they had expected to see her, for to the years below twenty the lines which nearly forty years

must engrave suggest age. But in reality she was wonderfully young looking for her age, with a faded look of childhood upon her, as if she were a little girl that some one had veiled unsuitably, and who was overtired. It was easy to understand that she had attracted people to her all her life. The girls, watching her, began to feel her charm, and to throb with rapid heartbeats, feeling it.

"Now I really must go to my room, children," she announced, rising at last. "I'm quite refreshed; the tea was excellent, my good Abbie. Where is Mr. Moulton? I never said a word to him when I got here! How rude of me! Yet how can one remember one's manners, meeting her three big girls, whom she last saw babies?"

"Mr. Moulton found Mark coming after him, and went home with him," Anne explained. "He bade me tell you, Mrs. Garden, that he begged to be excused from wearying you further to-night; that he hoped you would find yourself rested to-morrow, and that he and Mrs. Moulton would come to ask after you in the afternoon."

"That's very nice of him, Anne; he seems to be nicer than I remembered him. He bored me when I was a girl here, but the doctor adored him.

Are you going to take your mother up, my trio?" asked Mrs. Garden.

Mary, Jane, and Florimel eagerly crowded around her to escort her upstairs. Mary, remembering that Anne loved her no less, and knew her far better, than her own children, turned back and invited Anne to come, too, with her outstretched hand.

"What a pity I'm not a triangle!" said Mrs. Garden, as her three girls tried to find a place next to her simultaneously. "And my room! Quite unchanged! That's never the same paper, Anne? Yet I'm sure it is! How extraordinary!"

"We tried to match it, mother; Anne had kept a piece of the old paper," Jane explained. "Do you think you will like it?"

"I think I shall like you!" cried Mrs. Garden, taking the face of each of her girls in turn between her cool palms and kissing their foreheads.

Jane dashed away and, when Mary and Florimel followed her more slowly, they found her tempestuously crying for joy among the pillows on her bed, her small feet waving emotionally. She sat up when her sisters entered.

"She's so pretty, and has such ways, and we're not orphans any longer!" she gasped.

CHAPTER SIX

“SOMETHING BETWEEN A HINDRANCE AND A HELP”

Mary Garden woke with a start the next morning. Her room was filled with the beautiful light that preceded the sun on a mid-June morning, when the days are longest. She could not recall for a bewildered instant what it was that made her feel such a sense of great possession, such flooding joy. Then the chorussing birds in the garden below aroused her more fully, and she knew!

“The first day!” she thought, sinking back into the pillows, and into the birdsong and translucent air, feeling that all beauty flowed around her and held her up, that she lay on great joy-filled hands which at once gave to her and sustained her.

It was not yet four o'clock, so Mary gave herself up for a delicious half-hour to turning over the wealth that had come to her; she felt as one might whose hands were dripping with unset

gems of the purest water. It all lay before her—the setting, and learning, and enjoying of this strange gift. In that brief time which she had spent with her mother on her arrival Mary had seen that nothing which they knew of ordinary mothers would help the Garden girls to acquaintance with their own, neither in teaching them their duty toward her nor in enjoying her. As she lay in thought, gradually Mary's ecstasy in waking merged into a graver sense of responsibility that reversed the relationship of this new mother and her eldest daughter. Mary recalled her mother's pretty mannerisms, spontaneous yet trained; her dainty appointments, her dependence, her appeal, as of one who had been accustomed to homage and must have it.

“She has come home because she is cruelly wounded; we must remember that every moment,” Mary thought, feeling her way. “She cared more for her singing, her career, than for anything else—yes, *anything* else!” Mary repeated this to herself sternly. “We can't mean much to her yet; she doesn't know us. She will miss her old life dreadfully. She will feel wretched when she remembers that she cannot sing now. We must keep her from thinking of

it, but it will rush over her at times, in spite of all that we can do. I wonder how girls like us can keep her company, not let her get lonely, yet not bore her to death? Really, it is going to be hard—we must do our best!” Mary rebuked her thought for taking a form that might be interpreted to mean that the task would be hard to the girls: *hard*, not merely difficult. “We shall have a great deal to do!” And Mary sprang up and began to dress rapidly, as if to be ready to do. This morning she had expected to be first in the garden, but, early as it was, Jane was already there when she came down.

“I couldn’t sleep, the birds sang so,” Jane explained.

“And our hearts sang so, Janie,” Mary added. “That is what wakened me, though I never heard the birds sing as they did this morning, nor saw such a sunrise. Do listen to that cat-bird! He’s just like a little gray lead pipe, pouring out liquid song! Do hear how it bubbles and ripples!”

Jane tipped back her head till her long, delicate face was turned skyward, and the mounting sun transformed her hair into a part of himself, as if he were reflected in a golden shield.

"You know you can almost touch heaven when you're so happy, and when you're unhappy it seems too far away to be real. Yet some one is always happy, and some one else unhappy. If we could remember that, do you suppose heaven would always seem near?" Jane asked.

"I don't know; I suppose so, Janie. I've never been really unhappy, never more than sad, or sorry when our pets die—though that's bad enough! We never had anything to bear that we ought to call sorrow. I'm always happy," said Mary.

"I know you are!" cried Jane. "I'm not. It doesn't need sorrow to make me sorrowful. Sometimes I get up in the morning feeling as if I couldn't stand it; nothing special—just stand *it*! I get as blue! Then sometimes I could dance on the top of the river, I'm so light-hearted! This morning it doesn't seem as though the blue day could come. This is different; I know what I'm glad about now. It feels all warm and lasting."

"I suppose—perhaps—we ought not to be unhappy over nothing," said Mary.

"It's my hair," said Jane. "Everything is my hair! Mrs. Moulton says ups and downs are

part of 'the red-haired temperament.' Your temperament has brown hair, Molly darling, so you'll have to dye me, if you want to make me nice and steady-good."


"I don't want to make you anything that changes you, my Janie," said Mary. "And I didn't mean to preach."

"Preach all you want to, Sister Maria Serena; I don't mind preaching when people practise, too," said Jane, pirouetting on the extreme tips of her toes. "I came out to see if I could find the prettiest rose that ever bloomed for mother's plate at breakfast. I don't like any of them exactly. Do you think she ought to have a red, or a pink, or a white one, Mary?"

"Pink," said Mary instantly. "A long bud, just opening. One of us ought to offer to help her dress; she's used to a maid. Perhaps it would better be you, Jane. You are cleverer with your fingers than I am."

"I think I'd be afraid," said Jane, nervously, actually turning a little pale from the thought of not performing her task satisfactorily. "But I'd love to."

"Perhaps she wants to get up now, and is afraid of disturbing us," suggested Mary. "Shall we creep up to see if she is awake?"



The two girls crept up the stairs and listened at their mother's door. Mary's shoulder jarred the knob and Mrs. Garden called out:

"Is some one there?"

Softly, as if she had not spoken and might be asleep, Mary opened the door barely enough to admit, first Jane, then herself.

"Good morning, mother dear," Mary said. "Have we kept you waiting? Did you want to get up and go out in the garden before?"

"Before!" cried Mrs. Garden. "Angels and ministers of grace defend us! You out and out little American aborigine! It can't be much after five o'clock, and you ask me if I have wanted to go into the garden *earlier*?"

Mary looked so confused that Jane came to her rescue. "You see, mother, we get up at this time in summer. It's far lovelier in the garden now even than at sunset, fresher, and the birds sing quite differently. When we were little we used to play we were Adam and Eve, if we got up in time; we called it our 'new garden' at this hour. We never thought we could be Adam and Eve after breakfast."

"I've no doubt, Jane. In any case, Adam and Eve were not in the garden after they had eaten. But you see I've no desire to play at

Adam and Eve! I've not the least doubt that the garden is charming at dawn—but you see, my dears, the dawn is not charming; at least not as alluring as my comfortable bed. This is a remarkably comfortable bed, by the way. What time do you imagine I rise, girls?" asked Mrs. Garden.

Mary shook her head. "It sounds as though you meant us to guess a shocking hour, mother dear," she said.

"Not nearly as shocking as five o'clock, Mary dear," retorted her mother. "At home I have tea and rolls in bed, and come down about noon."

"Mercy! The day is just half gone then!" cried Jane.

"Not if one sings till nearly midnight and has supper after that, or dances, or entertains her friends," said Mrs. Garden. "Oh, my heart, my heart! And now I sing no more! Girls, I can't believe it! It is like a horrid dream. I waken trying to sing, or else I waken, to cry and cry, from a dream that I am singing again and the audience are clapping, clapping me, crying: 'Bravo, linnet!' They called me 'the linnet' at home, because my name was Lynette, and they loved my singing. Oh, me, oh, me!" She sank back with her face turned to her

pillow; her daughters saw her delicate body heave with sobs. Mary and Jane exchanged looks of distress.

"I think I can understand how hard it is, mother," Jane said, timidly kneeling beside the bed and touching one slender shoulder. "But maybe your voice will come back. Everything grows in our lovely garden! And we mean to take such care of you! Won't you get used to us, and think it isn't so very bad not to hear applause, when your three girls are admiring you as hard as they can?" she whispered.

"And how would you like to get up this one morning and come out with us, just to see the garden with the dew on it, and hear the birds?" Mary pleaded, following Jane and stroking her mother's hair with the hand that had been endowed with beauty and a healing touch. "I think it would make you feel as though nothing on earth mattered—for a while, at least. And you should have coffee out there, and rolls, or tea, if that's what you like better. You'd love to be the birds' audience this time, little clever mother."

Mrs. Garden turned and looked up at them with a quick movement and a laugh, though tears wet her cheeks; it was like one of Jane's swift changes.

“What wheedlers! And what determination!” she cried. “Very well, then, I’ll give in, and do the unheard-of: get up before six in the morning and go outdoors! Only wait till I write my English friends what little monsters I found over here, ready to drag me to torture! You two will have to be my maids and help me dress. I’m the most helpless creature, and you wouldn’t let me bring a maid over. I give you due notice: I’m going to get one here!”

“You shall have three, mother, if you like! First try us, and see if we can’t hook, and button, and brush you! We want to so dreadfully!” cried Jane. “That would be three, counting Florimel, though that wasn’t what I meant.” She dropped on her knees again, and began putting on her mother’s stockings and shoes, while Mary busied herself with sorting out the hairpins and small belongings on the dressing-table.

Both girls had become painfully shy and awkward, plainly trying to conquer it and make their mother feel, what was true, that they delighted in waiting upon her, but were too ill at ease to reveal their pleasure. Mrs. Garden, on the contrary, grew merry and playful. She had decided that the adventure of rising at what she called “the middle of the night” was wholly funny, and she

chattered and laughed throughout her dressing, without a hint of her former sadness.

Florimel added herself to the other two "Abigail," as Mrs. Garden called her lady's maids, and claimed for her share of the service her mother's pretty light-brown hair. "It's awfully soft and fluffy," said Florimel admiringly. "Is it the shampoo?"

"Eggs, my dear," said her mother. "The last maid I had would use nothing else. You don't imagine that's why I get up with the chickens—that the eggs have gone to my head, in another sense?"

"Perhaps you recited Chantecler; did you, mother?" suggested Mary. "You did recite, as well as sing, didn't you?"

"Oh, dear me, yes, but nothing of that sort! Child things. They say I can speak like a little girl. And then I wore the most ravishing little blue frock, and a captivating white pinafore. They say I actually looked a child. I'll do it for you some day. But what I love best to do is imitations. I'll do them all for you. My voice lets me recite for a short time," said Mrs. Garden eagerly.

"I should think, if it wasn't strong—it sounds clear and full when you talk—but if it got a

little tired I'd think you would sound more like a child than ever," Jane said.

"What an understanding child you are, Janie!" her mother said, bringing Jane's quick colour to her cheeks. "Really, I think we four shall get on quite nicely, don't you? Only you don't seem in the least like my daughters. Over there I was treated like a girl, myself."

"Of course," said Florimel decidedly. "I think it's more than likely we shall treat you like a girl, too, when we get acquainted."

"Now I'm ready. Dear me, don't you wear gloves in the garden? Nor garden hats? How frightful! Why, you'll be like—what's that little song I used as an encore? 'Three Little Chestnuts up from the Country?' That's it! You'll be three little brown chestnuts by autumn. Let me see your hands. Of course! Quite tanned, and it's only June! You have beautiful hands, Mary! I hadn't noticed them. Jane's are pretty, slender, and graceful; Florimel's are very well, but yours are beautiful, Mary. I think I've never seen nicer hands."

"Thank you, mother," said Mary, hiding them in her sleeves. "I hope they'll be able to do things for you."

"That's precisely the sort they look to be, my

dear," returned her mother. "Now, if you're ready, children, we may as well go out and see whether the early birds have caught the worms! Dear me, I hope they've made away with the caterpillars! The worst of gardens is that while the flowers are delightful, the insects are simply maddening."

The girls received a new impression of the garden when their mother came into it. To them it had always been their best-loved friend, awaiting them, laden with gifts, if they neglected it, which rarely happened. But Mrs. Garden did not regard it as wholly trustworthy. She did not plunge carelessly into its welcome, as her children did. Florimel was dispatched for a rug to guard her feet from dampness; Jane was sent back to get a down cushion to ease and protect her shoulders; Mary was set to testing currents of air, to determine where the least draught blew. Altogether it suddenly was apparent to the girls that going into the garden in the morning was not the simple thing they had thought it. Yet this frail "English bit of motherwort," as Mary called her, was delighted with the garden, the birdsong, the sunshine, and the fragrances, after she was made comfortable and safe.

Mary ran away to prepare coffee for her, Mrs. Garden having decided "to become a real American," she said, and break her fast with coffee, foregoing tea. But Anne had forestalled Mary. She had ready a delicious potful of the perfect coffee which was the pride of that household, and a tray filled with silver cups and saucers, cream and sugar, snowy rolls and golden butter, and another supplementary tray with a great bubble of a cut glass bowl filled with late strawberries, and the small translucent dishes in which to serve them.

"Oh, Anne, she must be happy here!" cried Mary, seeing these preparations.

"Don't worry, Mary; she will be. She's like a child, easily disturbed, easily pleased," said Anne. "She hasn't changed in the least. I knew you'd have to have something of this sort. Run back, dear child, and get out a small table and call Win down. Then I'll have Abbie help me with these trays."

"Isn't it lovely, Anne?" Mary exclaimed, flying on her errands.

Win needed no calling; he met Mary in the hall. "I'll take this, Molly," he said, preventing her attempt to carry out an old-fashioned work table, whose drop-leaves could be raised

for extra space. "Why are you carrying off the furniture? And why not get a van, if we're moving?"

"Breakfast in the garden, silly Win!" Mary panted. "Mother is out there! She is liking it, I think."

Win controlled his strong desire to suggest that she ought to like it. He had a very young man's intolerance of a dependent and petted woman, and he resented his sister-in-law's forsaking her little girls. Nevertheless, he made himself an acquisition to this garden party in the early morning, set up the table, brought chairs, helped with the trays, while Jane and Florimel arranged a wreath of Bleeding Heart around the table edge, and laid a rose at each place, and Mary stuck a branch of fragrant "syringa," the mock orange, in the back of each chair.

Mrs. Garden grew animated and childishly happy watching these preparations. "Isn't it nice? Isn't it delightful?" she repeated. "Quite like a garden party. I think I shall love it here. I didn't remember it was so nice. But then I was only a girl and there were no other girls with me. Now I have three girls and a fine gallant to keep me company; that explains

the difference. Couldn't you possibly find a little name for me that would be suitable, yet not so solemn as mother, girls? Somehow I think I'll never get used to being called mother."

"And it's so lovely!" Jane exclaimed before she thought, then could have bitten her tongue out for having spoken. Instantly she felt that this request summed up the situation: they must think of this pretty creature as something else than mother, something that expressed their protection for her, not implying dependence upon her.

"I've been thinking mother didn't suit," said Florimel, with her usual candour. "Would Madrina do? Madre is mother, and ina is a 'little'-whatever-it's-put-to, isn't it? That calls you our little mother, like the sort of a toy mother you'll be, I guess."

"Toy mother! Oh, Florimel! But perhaps that's what I am," laughed Mrs. Garden.

"Mother sounds less serious in French and Italian than it does in German and English," said Jane.

"Do you know languages, children?" asked Mrs. Garden.

"Not even one, though we can make ourselves understood in English," Mary said.

“I know a good deal of German and French, and Italian I really know quite well. I must begin to read with you, regularly, this summer. I don’t want to be only a hindrance to you girls; I want to be a help, too,” Mrs. Garden said with a pretty appealing eagerness.

“No fear of that! And, anyway, aren’t people the best kind of help when you can do for them? Let me give you these tremendous strawberries; I’ve been picking out some bouncing ones for you,” Mary urged, unconsciously illustrating the truth of the first part of her answer to this “toy mother.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

“’TIS JUST LIKE A SUMMER BIRD CAGE IN A GARDEN”

“Are you girls always as good as this?” asked Mrs. Garden on the third day after her arrival. Her tone expressed something akin to despair.

“Don’t you ever frolic, do anything young, perhaps something you ought not to do? You’re like my grandmothers.”

Mary and Jane laughed, glancing at each other.

“We’re being good purposely, you know,” said Jane. “It isn’t an accident.”

“Very likely Florimel is in mischief this minute,” Mary added consolingly. “She’s always likely to be, and it’s a good while since she has travelled off a walk.”

“How did you happen to name Mel that, madrina?” asked Jane. “Nobody else has that name.”

“I thought it pretty. The Gardens named you two; it was my turn to name a baby. *Flori*

has something to do with flowers, and *mel* is Latin for honey, isn't it? I thought it combined prettily with Garden. It's in Spenser's 'Fairy Queen,'" Mrs. Garden replied.

"Spenser's 'Fairy Queen!'" Jane's repetition expressed surprise.

"Oh, I never read it," her mother cried hastily. "It's far too long and old-time English to read, but I found out Florimel was in that poem. I always liked to feel that nice books were around me, and to hear them alluded to, but nobody but a teacher of English literature, I should fancy, would read Spenser."

Mary tipped her head back and laughed with great enjoyment. "You're such a funny little personage, Mrs. Garden! You often say what other people think, but don't dare to say," she cried.

"Oh, well, that's one advantage in having a career all your own; one doesn't have to bother about what other people do. I was a singer and entertainer; I never had to read books to talk about them, you see. Lots of people read what they think they ought to read; I always read exactly what I wanted to read, and let the rest go," explained Mrs. Garden frankly. "Don't you know any young people? No girls come

here, no boys, except that nice young secretary of Mr. Moulton's, whom you say Florimel found along the wayside—like a flower! Are your friends keeping away from me? Because I wish they wouldn't! Of course I've been having just the rest I needed since I came, but it might be—don't you think?—the least bit dull to go on forever this way. I remember I found Vineclad overwhelmingly dull when I lived here. Aren't there any pleasant people who will call on me, older than you are, but not so elderly, so *sedately* elderly as Mr. and Mrs. Moulton?" Mrs. Garden gave her daughters a glance like a naughty child venturing on mild disrespect to her elders. More than ever the relation between this mother and her children seemed to be reversed, as Mary received the glance and its suggestion with precisely that anxious air of helplessness so many mothers wear when their children threaten to prove difficult.

"Why, yes, mother dear, there are a good many young people in Vineclad who come to see us," she replied. "They are letting us have you all to ourselves at first, you know. We don't know them as we should have known them if Mr. Moulton had not been obliged to carry out father's ideas of education. Girls who are

taught at home are a little separated from the young people in school. But we see a good deal of the Vineclad girls and boys. And you will have lots of callers, of course, after people think you are ready for them. I don't know whether or not Vineclad is dull. I suppose it is, when you think about it and have lived somewhere else. But there are lovely people here. Didn't you know some you liked twelve years ago? They'd be here now, I'm sure."

"So am I sure of it! I fancy Vineclad people are rooted!" laughed her mother.

"They used to call on me; perfectly nice creatures, but—Mary, they used to want to teach me stitches and recipes because I was so young! And that was precisely why stitches and recipes did not interest me!"

"I think I like them." Mary looked apologetic.

"Because you are a little old lady! And I wasn't—and am not!" cried Mrs. Garden.

"I don't like them, either!" cried Jane. "But Mary loves fun, *madrina*. You see she hasn't been thinking of anything but getting you well."

"Surely I see," returned Mrs. Garden, with the smile that always made new applause burst forth when she acknowledged applause from her

audiences. "If you three little grandmothers of mine hadn't so far succeeded in getting me well, I suppose I should be quite content to sun myself in the garden, like a lizard. But—— Yet it's really very charming here in this garden and house! When my boxes get here I shall have no end of things to show you. You've no notion of the scrapbooks I'm bringing, with my programmes and press notices in them, and I'm afraid there'll be so many photographs of me you'll be impatient of them. But one's press agent demands constant sittings."

"It must seem dreadfully dull, madrina," said Mary, rising with a line between her clouded eyes. "Only wait! I should think you could wake Vineclad when you feel stronger. Perhaps it won't be so hard on you by and by. Poor little singing linnet! Much as I love to have you for my own, I think I'm able to wish it had not happened. I can faintly guess how hard it is to drop out of all that glory and come home to three little crude daughters, whom you don't know and who can't entertain you. Let me shake up that pillow!"

"You ought rather to shake me, sweet Mary!" cried her mother sincerely, not deaf, in spite of her regret for what she had lost, to the pathos in

this dear girl's voice, nor blind to the patient, self-forgetful depth of her pitying love. "I'll get on. It's a great thing to find you—each what you are."

"Well, I know I'd feel like an uprooted plant from the king's garden, dying on a country stone wall, if I were in your place!" cried Jane, with an explosion that amazed her mother.

"You are the most like me of the three, Janie," she said. "But I was never the little stick of dynamite that you are. I was merely a girl that loved her own way of being happy and found it. I never cared with the force you do; I liked and disliked quietly, and quietly slipped through what I disliked and chose what I liked. I still like pleasantness; it isn't particularly pleasant to feel too strongly, I fancy; I really never tried it. So I mean to enjoy rusting out here in Vine-clad with you—somehow! I haven't found the way yet. Don't look so anxious, Mary sweetheart. How did they happen to call you Mary? You are Martha, now, 'troubled about many things.' No, you're not! You are precisely what we mean when we say Mary!" Mrs. Garden lightly swayed herself backward and tipped up her face to invite Mary to kiss her, which she did, with heart as well as lips, feeling

that this exotic must blossom and brighten in their garden at any cost.

Later, in the pantry, Jane came upon Mary shaking the lettuce for lunch out of its cold-water submersion. She looked up, as Jane came in, with such a sober face that Jane shook her, lightly, much as she was shaking the lettuce.

"You look like a frost-bitten Garden," Jane declared, "and there's no sense!"

"Suppose we can't keep her, Janie? If she's unhappy we shall not want to keep her," Mary sighed, dropping a spoonful of mayonnaise on to the lettuce as if she said: "Ashes to ashes."

"I don't think she's so heartless, Mary," said Jane, intending to banish Mary's anxiety by a shock, and certainly succeeding in shocking her.

"Heartless! Oh, Jane!" Mary cried.

"What else would it be, if she didn't care enough about her own children to stay with them, when they were doing their best, too?" maintained Jane.

"If we had been her own children all along it would be different," Mary suggested. "I'm afraid such young girls as we can't make her happy. There's so much we have to replace."

"I think we're pretty nice," said Jane hon-

estly. "Lots of people like girls young; the younger the better. Some people prefer babies, even. Of course we are not companionable, like the people she's been with, nor entertaining that way, but I'd suppose we were interesting in another way. Besides, we're *hers*! There isn't any sense in trying to feel as if we were just little sugar gingerbread figures! We think Florimel is so pretty we can't do a thing, sometimes, but watch her. And you like me, and laugh at my nonsense. And I *know* you're—Mary! Often I want to fly off and do things and see things myself, but I know all the time I'd fly back to you fast enough! I always know that and say that, even when I'm craziest. I guess nobody could have you around, Mary Garden, and feel they had a right to you, and give you up, my darling! So what's the use of worrying too much about our cute little toy mother? She'll root in the garden!"

"You're a queer mixture, my Janie," said Mary, looking at Jane with laughter and gratitude in her eyes. "Nobody would be expected to love us as we love each other, you and I! Not that I mean that is part of the queer mixture. But you're as full of impossible schemes, and as flighty as the wind, yet you're

really so sensible! More so than I am and I seem——”

“The church steeple and I the weathercock!” cried Jane. “So you are, so I am. But you’re afraid of hurting somebody’s feelings, if you go to bed and think the truth in the dark, where nobody can see you, and when everybody thinks you’re asleep! I’m not! I think it’s right to see straight—then you’re pretty sure to stand by people, because you haven’t anything to change your mind about. That cute little mother ought to be crazy over such a girl as you are, Mary, and such a pretty, clever thing as Mel——”

“And such a flame-warm, and flame-clever, and flame-beautiful daughter as——”

“Get the fire extinguisher, Molly!” Jane interrupted. “You see, after all, you do know that our cunning linnet ought to enjoy her young birds in this garden! Though I’m sorrier than you can be for her to have lost her voice. Somehow, I believe I know better than you do what that is to her. Molly, did you ever think of it? You’re the reliable, house-motherly little soul, and I’m the flighty Garden, yet I’m older than you are, though I’m not sixteen, and you’re trotting right up to your eighteenth bend in the road?”

Mary looked at her a moment, turning this statement over in her mind. "You really are, in lots of ways. It's that trick you have of knowing what you don't know at all," said Mary, after that moment.

"Hurrah for Mistress Mary and her definitions! That's called intuition, Molly!" cried Jane.

To the amazement of both girls their mother came hurrying into the dining-room. Her step was quick, her face flushed, her whole expression and air alert as they had not yet seen it.

"Oh, girls," she cried breathlessly, "where can Anne be? Do you think you can do anything? There's a boy in the garden in a frightful way! He dashed in at the side gate and quite crumpled up before me! He's wet and besmeared with mud; I fancy he's been rescued from drowning, or some one has tried to drown him, and he barely made the garden, running away! I can't leave him there! Come, for pity's sake! Oh, where are Anne and Abbie? Why don't we keep a man about all day?" She wrung her hands frantically as she spoke.

Mary had dashed into the cold closet, back of the pantry, and brought out a glass of brandy. She snatched up the bottle of household am-

monia that stood on the shelf beside the pantry sink, not to take time to go after proper restorative ammonia. Jane had flown to the kitchen and had wrenched Abbie from her steak at its critical moment, then had shrieked Anne's name until she had heard and had almost fallen downstairs, recognizing the cry as announcing danger.

Mrs. Garden led the way, as light of foot and fleet as her children. Mary and Jane followed and Anne behind them, not able to move as quickly as the rest. A little in arrear of the other four lumbered Abbie, whose joints were refractory, carrying a pail of water and a glass, also a large palm leaf fan.

A short distance from the chair in which the girls had left their mother lay a boy of childish build. A gray felt sombrero hat covered his head; he was as wet and muddy as Mrs. Garden had described him, but he was able to move for, as the rescue party came up, he rolled over on his face, having been turned as if to get more air, and Jane's keen eyes saw him pull his hat tighter down over his head by the hand farthest from them, slipped up to catch its broad brim. The lad wore grayish knickerbockers and a loose flannel shirt that had been white,

but the mud with which he was generously decorated concealed its original colour and barely revealed that his stockings were black and his shoes old tan ones.

“Wait a minute,” said Jane, thinking that there was something familiar in the boy’s drooping shoulders and build. She put out her hands to check Mary, who, overflowing with sympathy, was hastening to lift the lad and pour between his cold lips a little of the brandy which she carried. “Wait a minute, Anne; let mother turn him over.”

Mary stopped, but looked at Jane, astonished. Anne gave her a sharp glance.

“All right, Jane; I think maybe it would be better,” Anne said.

“Oh, I don’t want to touch him! I never could bear to do anything of this sort!” shuddered Mrs. Garden.

She went up to the boy, nevertheless, and shrinkingly took him by the two driest spots that she could select on his shoulders and turned him. He resisted her and made the turning unexpectedly hard, considering that he had fallen as he lay when he had entered, as if his last drop of strength had been drained. Pulling him over, Mrs. Garden fell back with a cry.

"Florimel! Florimel, you little wretch! Whatever is wrong with you? Why are you in such clothes?" she gasped.

Florimel lay on her back, the hot sunshine of noon streaming down on her mischievous face. Her black hair, shaken loose by her movement, tumbled about her from the sombrero covering it. Her eyes danced, her red cheeks dimpled, and her teeth gleamed as she lay, laughing till she could not speak, ripples and chuckles shaking her, the picture of supreme enjoyment.

"You handsome imp!" cried her mother, as if she could not help it. "You frightened me almost out of my life. I never dreamed it was you. Whatever did you do it for?"

"That's why: to scare you," said Florimel, lying still, in no hurry to get up, nor having much breath with which to do so. "I was watching you this morning and I thought you looked dull; I thought, maybe, you'd like to have something happen. Whenever we get to feeling that way it's up to Jane or me to start something. I knew Jane wouldn't dare, not for you, yet, so I did. Got these things down at Allie Ives', her brother Phil's, you know." Florimel turned her brilliant eyes on her sisters,

expecting them to recognize Phil Ives. "Allie and I muddied them up—Mrs. Ives didn't care, Phil's outgrown them—and we turned the hose on me; I never take cold, Anne knows it! Then I ran home, by the back way, and tumbled in here! I thought it would scare you! It did, didn't it?" Florimel pleadingly asked her mother, desiring to hear again of her complete success.

"Certainly it did, dreadfully." Mrs. Garden's tone was satisfactory to Florimel.

"Didn't any one see you coming home, Florimel? What would they think!"

"That's all right, little motherkins," cried Florimel, jumping up and displaying her costume, with its muddy wetness, to such a ridiculous effect that there was no scolding her, for it *was* funny. "I didn't meet any one but the Episcopalian minister, and he loves nonsense, and the grocer's boy, and he grinned; he loved it! And an old funny woman down the street who is too nearsighted to see I wasn't some boy—unless Chum gave me away, but I guess she doesn't know Chum! Anyhow, people all know we're the Garden girls, and Vineclad always looks up to Gardens, so it doesn't matter. Besides, they expect me to cut up; I always do—and Mary never! It's all right, mothery.

Do you like me better as a boy? I do. Why didn't you let the baby be a boy, little mother? When you had two girls, and she'd have loved so to have been one?"

"Did you actually do this because you wanted to entertain me?" asked Mrs. Garden, looking as helpless as she felt, laughing, yet puzzled by this prank.

"You and me," said Florimel honestly. "I'd got tired of being so steady ever since you came. I'm always getting into scrapes; I thought it was time you got acquainted with the real me—not that this is a scrape! But honest and true, I did think you looked as if it was time something shook you up, little lady-mother."

"I felt that," Mrs. Garden acknowledged. "But, really, Florimel, I hope you won't feel obliged to go to extremes to enliven me! Oughtn't she get off those wet clothes, Mary; oughtn't she, Anne? Do you really think it won't make her ill?"

"She's proof against illness, or she'd have been buried ten years ago," said Anne. "She's as healthy as a ragamuffin—which she looks like! Of course you must go and dress, Florimel! Did you leave your frock at Allie's? Lunch is almost ready, too."

“Oh, Jerusalem Halifax Goshen! My steak, my steak! You abominable, desolating Florimel, if it’s burnt!” screamed Abbie, dropping her pail, with the glass now floating on its surface, and ambling toward the house, her big palm leaf fan making her look like a large insect with one disabled wing.

“If Florimel sees that you need entertaining, I think we’d better give a tea for you, and invite Vineclad to make your acquaintance, madrina,” said Mary, offering her mother her arm for support from the garden to the house after the shock of Florimel’s invasion.

Mrs. Garden slipped her hand into Mary’s arm and shook it delightedly. “If only you would!” she cried. “I’ve been wishing you would, but I didn’t like to suggest it. Why not a garden party? I have the loveliest gown for it you ever saw in all your life, and a hat that shades my face just enough! They told me it made me look less than twenty-five! I wore it at home in England. But only once, girls; think of it! Do give me a party! I never wore that delicious costume except to the *fête champêtre* which dear Lady Hermione gave when Balindale came of age. You know Lord Balindale is not yet twenty-two, and this was

his twenty-first birthday, last September. The gown isn't in the least out of style. How lovely you are, Mary, to have thought of this!"

Mary stopped short in their slow progress houseward. She looked at her mother, and then at Jane aghast. "Oh, little mother," she cried, "what are we to do! Here you've been playing with countesses and having coming-of-age parties, precisely like an English story, and we've nothing in the least splendid to give you here! The greatest personages in all Vineclad and its neighbourhood are Mrs. Dean, the widow of the founder of the college; the various ministers' wives, and the doctors' and lawyers' families, and the bank families; and a retired author, who is really very nice, but doesn't care to go out a great deal; and Mr. and Mrs. Moulton! And is Lord Balindale an earl?"

"Certainly he is, but one doesn't expect earls in a republic. Americans are quite as nice in manners and as clever as titled people—provided they are nice Americans—though, as a rule, their voices are not as good! Of course one doesn't expect much in a small country place! But pray give the party, Mary! At least I can wear my gown, and it will be something to think about!" begged Mrs. Garden.

“Of course, if you want it,” Mary hesitated, but Jane cried:

“That’s the idea; it will be an excuse for dressing up, and being nice yourself! I always imagined parties were things to dress up for more than they were to enjoy. All I ever went to were, anyway! We’ll have a lovely garden party, little madrina, if only because you’ll be lovely at it!”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“AND ADD TO THESE RETIRED LEISURE,
THAT IN TRIM GARDENS TAKES HIS PLEASURE”

Mary and Win were walking slowly over to Mr. and Mrs. Moulton's, discussing the coming party with immense seriousness, at least on Mary's part. Win could not be induced to regard it as of as much importance as she did.

“Mary,” he said, “it's precisely here: you give a party; you do your best to make it a pleasant party, to both sides, hosts and invited; you either succeed, or you don't—most likely you neither quite succeed nor quite fail. And when the next full moon comes around it won't make tuppence worth of difference how it came out. That's the way I look at it, and it's the right way to look at it, not because it's my way, but because it *is*! This won't be different from all other Vineclad parties.”

“Mercy, yes, it will!” cried Mary. “Mother hasn't been at the others.”

“Not since you remember parties, nor I, for

that matter, but she has been here," said Win. "She knows what to expect, and if Vineclad doesn't remember her, all the better for Vineclad. It ought to be an interesting party to the town, because it has her to wonder over beforehand, and to see at the time. Your guests are sure to enjoy it. Whether Lynette does, what she'll think of it, I don't know."

"But I can guess," sighed Mary. Then they both laughed.

"Mary's come to be braced up, Mrs. Moulton," announced Win, when they had been greeted by both Mr. and Mrs. Moulton, and after Mark Walpole, with a shining, joyous face, had brought for Mary the low chair she liked, and placed it beside her guardian.

"It's pleasanter within to-night, my dear," Mrs. Moulton said. "I think there's a heavy dew. What is wrong, child, that you need bracing?"

"Nothing wrong, Mrs. Moulton, and I need encouraging, not really bracing; that's Win's exaggeration. I—we've got to give a party."

"Dear me, why?" asked Mr. Moulton. "Are you coming out, Mary?"

"No, sir; never, I imagine," said Mary. "I'm out, or I never shall be out; I don't know which

it is. We children were born knowing everybody in old Vineclad, so there's no society for us to be introduced to; we've been asked to places with you ever since we could walk. But mother is getting restless; she needs amusing. We have to give a party, a tea—no, a garden party; to get her introduced to her neighbours.”

“I see! Why should that afflict you, Mistress Mary?” asked Mr. Moulton.

“Everything is so turned about!” cried Mary. “We've got to invite people to meet our mother. Who ever heard of girls doing that? And—do you suppose we can make it a nice party? And isn't it ridiculous for us to ask people? Yet mother doesn't want to, because no one has yet called on her—except you, and you are our own! Wouldn't it be better if you sent out the invitations, Mrs. Moulton?”

“I invite people to your house to meet your mother, my dear? Hardly! Send your invitations and don't worry. I see you are afraid that Vineclad society may bore your mother. There is a consolation in Vineclad, as there is almost always a good side to a drawback! If Vineclad is dull it is because it is so small and old-fashioned, and, for that very reason, it will not misunderstand you, nor be

critical of the peculiarities of your party. I think you may safely count upon a pleasant afternoon, my dear," Mrs. Moulton reassured her.

"Mother has a beautiful gown for a garden party, which she wants to wear. She has worn it but once, to Lord Balindale's coming-of-age celebration, in England. He's an earl, Mrs. Moulton! And for the second time she is to wear it here. Doesn't it sound rather awful?" Mary asked.

"I haven't heard a description of it, Mary," said Mrs. Moulton dryly. "I doubt that your mother would have an awful gown. Of course you can't mean that you are overpowered by its having been worn on a superior occasion? No good American admits superior occasions—at least not titled superiors. And, if it came to that, my child, the original Garden bore a title and renounced it, when he came here, for conscientious reasons. Doesn't that offset the incense of past glories which that gown may waft?"

"Yes, it does. I knew that about the first Garden, but I haven't thought of it for a long time," laughed Mary. "To tell the truth, it isn't the earl's party in itself that worries me: it's

only that I do so want mother to be happy here!”

“Surely, dear,” said Mr. Moulton gently. “Your mother is easily won by kindness. After she has fluttered a while, restlessly, she will settle down in our blest Garden spot. She is more of a child than any one of her children, I think.”

“So do I!” cried Mary. “I would never think of going to her with bothers, as I do to you. We all feel that we must protect her, even that witch of a Florimel feels it. Then you think our party will be all right, and I may go on and make out the list of invitations? Will you help me with that, Mrs. Moulton? I think we ought not to ask a few, as I thought at first. I think it would be right to ask everybody we know, not just our own set; then mother will really be introduced to Vineclad.”

“Please hand me my fountain pen and a pad, Mark,” Mrs. Moulton answered Mary indirectly. “We’ll make out our list this instant.”

For an hour they worked on this task, Mr. Moulton and Win throwing in suggestions which Mark saw were absurd, although he did not know any of the people discussed, because the elder and the younger man twinkled at each other in making them, Mary laughed at them,

and Mrs. Moulton passed them over with dignified contempt.

"That is seventy-five names, Mrs. Moulton," Mary announced, adding up the three pages of the pad. "Some of these people won't come, but most of them will. Isn't that a large party? Jane and I counted up a third of those in the first place."

"Either you must make it small, keep it within the circle which the Garden family has always moved among, or else you must include every one set down here," said Mrs. Moulton. "Since you are to do this, Mary, I advise making it what the Old Campaigner, in the Newcomes, called 'an omnium gatherum.'"

"With a caterer?" asked Mary.

"No. With cakes ordered from Mrs. Mills and ice cream and thin homemade sandwiches and your own coffee, tea, and chocolate. Abbie and Anne can manage it. I'll lend you Violet; she is unsurpassed in cooking; her coffee is indescribable. But you know that. And you know she is like all of her race, ready to do anything for any one she likes, though quite unreconcilable to those whom she does not fancy. And you know she calls you: 'Dem Gyarden blossums!' Vineclad would be inclined to re-

sent a caterer. What are you three to wear?" Mrs. Moulton ended with a look of suspicion at Mary.

Mary proved that the suspicion was just by the dismay that overspread her face. Then she laughed.

"Never thought of it; not once!" she cried. "But we have something that will do. A white dress is best, isn't it?"

"I don't know as to that, but you have not 'something that will do!'" said Mrs. Moulton firmly. "You are to send for something perfectly new, and perfectly suitable. You must live up to the gown that appeared at the earl's majority celebration. White for you, demure Mary, but I think pale sea green for Jane, and rose colour for Florimel. I shall write to New York in the morning to have gowns sent up on approval; I have an account at Oldfellow's. I intend to see that you are properly apparelled for this introductory festivity."

"Althea, I am not sure that I shall approve your teaching Mary to be vain," interposed Mr. Moulton.

"Austin," his wife retorted, "if nature is not strong enough to make a girl of seventeen vain, I shall be quite harmless. I suppose I should

dislike vanity in our girl, but I sometimes feel that I should like to make her know that she was worth considering."

"Oh, dear Mrs. Moulton!" Mary protested, rosy red from her throat to her soft brown hair. "No fear of my forgetting Mary Garden."

"I see her alluded to in the papers rather often," said Mr. Moulton. "I saw to-day that she was singing in London."

"Poor real Mary Garden!" sighed Mary, pityingly, as she arose to go. "She has to be used so much to tease me!"

"The party's all arranged, is it?" asked Win, also rising.

"No, indeed; it's only arranged to be arranged!" cried Mary, looking around the grave room with the affection she always gave it.

It was a high-ceiled room, with arched doorways, white wainscoting, an ample unadorned fireplace; soft green, patternless paper on the walls making an effective background for excellent pictures, and its furniture was plain and solid, square in outlines, upholstered in dark brocade.

"This room always looks to me as if it had never let anything that was not good come into it, at least not to stay in it," she said.

"That is true," Mrs. Moulton confirmed her, adding with a look of profound admiration at her husband: "Mr. Moulton's father built this house and they say Austin is his father over again."

"I'll walk with them, if you are not going to close the house for a while, Mrs. Moulton," said Mark, offering Mary the little scarf which had slipped from her arm to the floor. There was a look in his eyes, as his hand lightly brushed Mary's shoulder, laying the scarf over it, that sent the colour flushing to Mrs. Moulton's brow, it so surprised her.

"I'm sure I don't know what I should say to that!" she exclaimed. Then, as Mark looked at her in blank amazement, she recalled herself. "Of course, walk over with them, Mark; we are not going to bed for an hour or so," she added.

"They're awfully good to me, Mary and Win," said Mark, as they went along the street made silent by Vineclad's early bedtime habits. "Mr. Moulton is trusting me more and more with important bits of his work, and they both are treating me as if they considered me something besides a snip of a boy whom they were paying. I'm having a fine time with them and

the botanical work I wanted to do but never expected to be able to touch."

"Gets better every day, doesn't it?" cried Mary, raising her face to his, glowing with pure joy over this fortunate state of things.

"Every day lovelier than the last!" declared Mark, looking into Mary's unclouded, unsuspecting eyes. And Win silently received the impression which, a little earlier, had startled Mrs. Moulton, but of which Mary was as unconscious as a crystal is of the rainbow colours playing through it.

In the succeeding days after this call the hours sped rapidly, filled with the absorbing topic of the garden party and its business. The invitations were sent out and all but six of them were accepted. The gowns sent up from New York by the famous house of Oldfellow proved to be deliriously attractive. Mary did not hesitate a moment, but seized upon a soft white gown, so simple in its lines, so exquisite in material, design, and workmanship, with its only trimming real lace upon its clinging round neck and sleeves, that it seemed to have been designed expressly for this girl, whose sweetness was of a type that forbade ornate decoration. Jane could not decide between a pale green gown and a pale golden

one, either of which made of her brilliant, delicate beauty a jewel perfectly set. The golden gown won the day at last and in it Jane's red-gold tints of hair and eyes became the attributes of a sun-maiden. Florimel was offered no choice of colour, only of design in various rose pinks. Above each one she glowed like a living rose. The frock they all voted for her to wear was the palest of them all, a shell-like rose colour, floating over its own shade.

Mrs. Garden was in ecstasy; she gained in strength on each of these happy days. "I don't care what the party is like, I'm having such fun now!" she truthfully declared.

Mrs. Mills, whose cakes were the correct supplement to one's own kitchen limitations in Vineclad, sparing the housekeeper the mortification of having recourse to a professional caterer, made the best examples of her skill for the Garden garden party. Ice cream might be ordered from the nearest large town; Vineclad did not disapprove of buying ice cream, so for this party it was ordered from abroad. But this did not release the Garden kitchen from weighty obligations and achievements. It was supplemented by Violet, Mrs. Moulton's most competent and blackest of cooks, to whom the preparation of

the coffee was securely entrusted. Twelve young girls, from the nearby industrial school orphanage, were engaged to serve the guests. They were to be dressed alike, in white waists and skirts, and Mrs. Garden pronounced their effect "refreshing among the garden foliage and blossoms."

Jane dressed her mother's hair, relieved to know that her picturesque hat would more than conceal any deficiency in her maid's skill. The gown which had but once before appeared in public, and then in an august and distant place, was revealed for the first time to the girls; Mrs. Garden had refused them a glimpse of it before the day. It was of white lace, skirt, waist, and coat, lined with white silk, yet touched, with a French artist's skill, with exactly the correct effective amount of a wonderful red, like the heart of a rare rose. Roses of the same shade lay, as if they had fallen, on one side of the lace on the hat, and the same marvellous colour lined the lace parasol, that added the last touch of perfection to the costume.

"Didn't that young earl, Lord Balindale, die on his twenty-first birthday? I'd expect that dress and all to be the end of him," said Florimel, regarding her mother literally with open mouth and eyes.

“Nice, isn’t it?” said Mrs. Garden, much gratified by the effect of her magnificence. “No, he survived, Florimel. There were other gowns there that day which might easily have been as fatal as this one. Do you suppose all Vineclad will perish off the earth? We’ve asked most of it here.”

“Well, there’s one thing sure, it never in all it’s vineclad life saw anything like you, Mrs. Lynette Garden, who-can’t-possibly-be-our-mother!” declared Jane.

“Some of our guests will adore you, and some of them will detest you; your gown is too magnificent for a small place like Vineclad to stop halfway,” said Mary, displaying her understanding of small places. “Of course our own friends will be in raptures over you,” she added, seeing her mother’s face cloud.

A carpet rug had been spread at one end of the lawn side of the garden; on this Mrs. Garden, her daughters, and Mrs. Moulton were to stand to receive the guests. The invitations had run “from five to nine.” This allowed the heat of the day to be over when the first guests came, and it gave three hours of sunset light to show the beauty of the scene at its best, and one hour in which the Japanese lanterns, hung from tree

to tree throughout the great garden, might burn to transform it into fairyland for the close of the garden festival. It was funny to see the arrival of the guests. Vineclad held certain families, like the Moultons and the Gardens themselves, which for generations had been accustomed to the best society, at home and abroad; but the majority of its citizens were the average small-town type, upright, good people, refined in taste and principles, ambitious to grasp opportunity as it was offered to them, but wholly inexperienced in the ways and standards of a larger, better-equipped world.

When these women, in their "best dresses," eloquent of the home use of paper patterns, secure, most of them, in being silk, decorated with a fichu of machine-made lace, came up to greet the Garden girls and be presented to the princess who looked scarcely older than they, and yet was introduced to them as "my mother," their faces were a study. The struggle between diffidence, pride, and amazement was so easily read that Mrs. Garden grew younger every instant, finding herself once more taking part in a play, and the rôle assigned to her far from easy.

But Florimel, with her overflowing fun, Mary, with her sweetness and tact, beloved as she was

by the entire community, high and low, threw themselves into the task of entertaining, and were seconded by some of their girl friends and some older ones, and most of all by Win, who knew precisely how to set everybody at ease and to make them forget themselves in a laugh. Jane never could be at her best in a crowd, so she stayed at her post beside her mother, leaving the entertaining to the others.

The people whom Mrs. Garden had known when she had lived her brief married life in Vine-clad came later than the others and instantly Mrs. Garden renewed her slight acquaintance with them, chatting and laughing so prettily that they were enchanted with her. Jane, close at her elbow, made mental notes of how to be a social success.

The refreshments were delicious, the young waitresses served them deftly, Anne and Abbie directing them, and to their boundless relief, the Garden girls saw that all their guests were, at last, having a thoroughly good time. Win and Mark commanded a selected force of young men, or big boys, as one liked better to regard them, and lighted the lanterns when the last radiance of the beautiful June afterglow faded away. Ray by ray the myriad little lights be-

gan to gleam over the garden, made more vast, and transformed into mystery, by the deep shadows waving between these stationary fire-flies, swinging with their particoloured shapes in all directions. The guests knew that they were expected to go, but still lingered, entranced by the beauty of the scene which the sunset had made lovely beyond words, but which the lanterns now, beneath the stars, revealed in a new and more fascinating beauty.

“If only I could sing! Can’t you start them singing, Jane?” whispered Mrs. Garden.

Always ready to sing, Jane raised her voice, and from all over the great garden the chorus joined her, till at last, realizing that they were exceeding the time limit of their invitations by almost an hour, the guests sang the good-night song: “Good-night, Ladies,” and melted away.

With one of her characteristic changes of mood the tears ran down Mrs. Garden’s cheeks in the shadow of the tree against which she leaned, and fell on her glorious gown. She could no longer sing; she was so tired; she had had a happy time; the garden was full of sweet odours, brought out by the night; it was all wonderful, mysterious, lovely—and she could no longer sing! Mary, quick to see every move-

ment of her new, absorbing charge, noted the droop of her body and went to her, slipping both arms around her mother's slender waist.

"Had a nice time, little madrina? Tired?" she asked.

"I've enjoyed it a great deal better than I thought I should, I've had a nice time, really, Mary. And I'm launched in Vineclad society!" said Mrs. Garden, with a nervous laugh that to Mary's true ear held in it the suggestion of a sob.

"You're tired, dearest," said this mother-daughter. "Say good-night to Mr. and Mrs. Moulton—they're still here—and come to bed."

CHAPTER NINE

“WHOSE YESTERDAYS LOOK BACKWARD
WITH A SMILE”

There were two immediate results of the garden party. One seemed trivial, but indirectly brought about important effects. The other made immediate difference in the daily life of the Garden girls, and seemed to them more important than it was. The first result of the party was that Mrs. Garden insisted upon employing “a whole gardener,” as Florimel put it. The old garden was so well established, such a large proportion of its lavish bloom came from hardy perennials and trim shrubs of generous natures, that Mary and Win, who decided such questions, had never thought it necessary to employ a gardener exclusively for their work, but had claimed a sixth of a skilful, but cranky, Scot, who gave one day a week to them and to five other families.

The garden party had been damaging to the garden in its more vulnerable parts, and now

Mrs. Garden, for the first time intervening in household arrangements, urged the employment of a man who should be all the Gardens' own—and their garden's own.

"He might be a person who could also drive a car," she suggested. "I think I shall get a car soon."

"Oh, madrina, let us be your chauffeuses!" Florimel cried, jumping up and down, instantly afire. "Jane and I would love to run a car!"

"But not Mary!" Mary interposed. "I wouldn't be a 'chauffeure' for anything you could offer me."

"Mel is right; I'd love it," said Jane. "Do you suppose we could do it, madrina?"

Their mother regarded them thoughtfully, her head on one side, as if the car were waiting and the question admitted no delay in answering.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "I'm not fond of seeing girls do men's work. Yet you two are rather the sort to carry it off well; do it well and not have the effect of oversmartness. We might make it a success. But that has nothing to do with the gardener and his driving; you couldn't look after the car altogether."

"Now just imagine sitting up in the front seat,

with your hands on the wheel, and stooping over to change gears, in that easy way, just as if you'd shifted gears for ages!" cried Florimel, in irrepressible rapture over the picture.

"I always thought that I should like to blow one of those horns, that sound like sudden hysterics, right behind a fearfully stout man who had no idea a car was near," said Jane, candidly acknowledging this naughty-small-boy ambition.

"How does one get servants in Vineclad?" Mrs. Garden persisted, intent upon her new idea. "I want a man about the place; we need one. Shall we advertise?"

"I suppose so," Mary hesitated. "You left us Anne, you know, and she has looked after everything till Jane and I began to be able to help. Mrs. Moulton found Abbie long ago. We never had to get any one. I don't believe there are many gardeners in Vineclad—or chauffeurs, especially not together! I imagine you must advertise in the city."

"I'll put in an advertisement, then I'll get Win to go down and buy the car—I couldn't decide on one myself—and see the men who answer the advertisement. It ought to work out perfectly," said Mrs. Garden, more and more in love with her plan as it matured. She was

quite childish about it, as eagerly anticipating her gardener as her car, and perfectly sure, now that she had decided upon them, that she must not delay an unnecessary hour obtaining them.

The second result of the garden party was that "the Garden girls' cute mother" became the absorbing interest with the other girls of Vineclad. Mrs. Garden's prettiness, her little ways, her poetical name—the girls declared that Lynette Garden was the loveliest name that they had ever heard—her interesting history and, not least, her marvellous costume worn at the party, were discussed with unflagging interest among the younger generation in Vineclad. Mrs. Garden was so wonderfully youthful that the girls felt no hesitation in approaching her, so her three daughters suddenly found themselves in demand, as never before.

Elias Garden, LL.D., had held certain peculiar theories relative to girls' education. He held them so strongly that, in making his friend Austin Moulton their guardian, he had laid down the course which must be taken in regard to his girls' training definitely, under such binding conditions in his will that there was no loophole for Mr. Moulton, nor for their mother, had she stayed in Vineclad, to bring them up

otherwise than as Mr. Garden had ordained. Neither of the girls was to go to any sort of school until she was eighteen; then she was to be free to choose her career and the preparation for it. But, with all the preceding years spent outside of special training, it was a question whether one of the Garden girls would be prepared at eighteen to take the required examination for entrance in a school suitable to that age. Their father had insisted upon certain studies for his children, under carefully selected masters. Languages the doctor had left for more mature study; the ordinary accomplishments of young girls he had said should be acquired, or passed over, according to the individual talents of the children. But history they must learn; philosophy they must read; mathematics were to be taught them thoroughly, and, especially, English literature, and still more English literature; and a careful, but not a textbookish grammatical study of the English tongue. Astronomy and geology they were to read with a competent teacher. The doctor had requested that they be made conversant with foreign lands, through books of travel, and especially that they be given a general knowledge of great art and music; not to draw, to

play, nor to sing, but in such wise that they might enjoy other people's performance and the noble pictures, statues, and architecture which are the inheritance of the ages. For the rest Doctor Garden had amply provided for the training of any particular talent that one of his girls might develop; these things were obligatory.

In consequence of these theories, incumbent upon their guardian to carry out, Mary, Jane, and Florimel were separated from other girls of their age by the insurmountable barriers of their different education. Nourished as they were upon the great English classics, they knew much that girls of their age had not only never heard of, but which a great many people, unfortunately, miss throughout their lives. They were thoughtful and mature beyond their years because their minds were stored with the best of the poets, yet they were wholly ignorant of the world and knew nothing of what children younger than Florimel pick up from one another. They were more than anxious to be friendly to their contemporaries, and they were liked for their wit, their friendliness, their beauty. But the other Vineclad girls pronounced the Garden girls "queer," that convenient word, covering

what is not clearly perceived, and, with amiability on both sides, the Garden girls were usually left to their own companionship—which, after all, they preferred to any other.

But now the state of things was different. The Vineclad girls began to frequent Hollyhock House, drawn by the fascination of the charming little creature who was the girls' unexpected and unlikely mother, and who had been before the public so long, even, it was whispered, having "sung at court!" Mrs. Garden was quick to perceive that she was fast becoming an idyl and an idol to the girls. She felt so much younger than her years, she was so fond of admiration and so accustomed to it, that she basked in the adulation of her visitors and became happier and more contented for having it.

"The girls are so dear, Mary," she said. "Really, I find them perfectly charming! It would never do to say so, but I think Vineclad is far nicer in its younger set than in its older one. I'm quite happy with the girls, but I find their mothers and aunts a little, just a little frumpy—please, dear!"

Mary laughed. "I'll let you, small madrina; don't be afraid to say it! I'm so glad that the girls amuse you! It must be because we've got

our labels on wrong; we are your mother and you are our little girl!"

"Oh, *you're* not pokey, Mary; not you, nor Jane, nor Florimel; not a bit! You are much the cleverest girls here, as you are the prettiest. That isn't prejudice, because even now I can't believe you're my babies, but it's a fact!" cried Mrs. Garden loyally. "You know I haven't shown you my scrapbooks nor my photographs yet. Well, I'm going to have them all brought into the garden this afternoon, and Gladys Low, Dorothy Bristead, Audrey Dallas, and Nanette Hall are coming to see them with you. You won't mind?"

"Why, mother-girl, of course not! We like those girls best," cried Mary.

"So do I!" said Mrs. Garden, evidently greatly pleased by this unanimous verdict. "Wait! I'm going to call up the Moultons and ask that nice Mark Walpole to come over. Then I'll call up Win and tell him to come home early. Girls always have a better time with some boys about, even though there aren't enough to go around! It's better fun that way, once in a while; then one has the fun of seeing which of the girls score."

"I'm shocked, madrina!" cried Jane, coming

in at that moment and swinging her mother's scant hundred and eight pounds off the floor in a big hug. "Needn't bother with Sherlock-Holmes-experimenting on Win! He thinks Audrey Dallas beyond scoring, soared right up to the top of the column and stayed there!"

"Really!" cried Mrs. Garden, pausing with the telephone handle in her hand as she was about to ring up the Moultons' number. "I didn't know! Why didn't you tell me? I love a romance, and Win is a dear boy—always was."

"We never thought about it. It's not a romance, yet," said Jane carelessly. "Win thinks she's the only girl in sight, except us, and we don't count that way. But Audrey's aiming for college, and Win isn't visible to her naked eye; no boy is! He sees her, and no one else, when she's around."

"Audrey may be intent on college, Janie, and not courting romance now, but I assure you I never saw a girl in my life so interested in intellectual aims that she could not at least see a handsome youth's admiration, even though she would not dally to regard it," said Mrs. Garden wisely. "Central, please give me Mr. Austin Moulton, 4-8-2 Willow Street."

Florimel had been on the couch, submerged in

a book and a box of buttercups, a combination that satisfied her, mind and body, for she dearly loved the condemned habit of eating while she read. Now she raised her head and rolled over approvingly.

"That's what I always thought, *madrina*. I don't believe a girl doesn't feel pleased when such a perfect duck of a fellow as our Win thinks she's the cream of the whole dairy! And I'm sure she's as proud as she can be to think she's strong minded enough to go right on thinking she's only thinking of college! I'm only thirteen, but I can see that," she announced.

"Just let me order a few thinks, *madrina*, when you're through with the telephone; Mel put all the thinks we had in the house into that sentence," said Jane.

"Mother can't hear when they connect her if you two keep up that chatter," suggested Mary. "As to being *only* thirteen, Mellie, I've an idea that thirteen sees most, because it's so sharply interested in getting facts—especially of that sort!"

"Well, I'm interested in all there is going," said Florimel truthfully, once more plunging into her book, which swallowed her up as completely and instantly as if she had not emerged from it.

"Mark will come! I'll tell Win now. Perhaps I'd better say who'll be here, if you think he likes to see Audrey," cried Mrs. Garden gleefully, perfectly happy in the prospect of the afternoon before her.

"Isn't it lucky our linnet sings over trifles as cheerfully as over anything worth chirping about?" asked Jane. She and Mary were always congratulating each other on their mother's childish lightness of heart.

The girls came trouping, all together, at a little before three in the afternoon.

"It's fearfully early to come, Mary," said Dorothy Bristead, as spokesman of the four, "but Mrs. Garden told us to come early; she had too much to show us to get through in a short time. Besides, we couldn't wait. She told us something about the photographs she's going to show us. Are they wonderful?"

"We haven't seen them yet," began Mary, then added quickly, seeing that Dorothy looked shocked: "Her boxes have been an endless time coming; they have been here only four days. Mother wanted us to wait until she had everything arranged in order for us to see. It isn't that we're not as interested as we can be."

"Oh, yes!" breathed Gladys Low fervently.

"She told us about her little girl costumes and Snow White and the Easter Bunny! And the flower dress! I don't see how you *bear* it, girls, to have her right in the house, and to know she is your mother! I'd be *crazy*!"

"It isn't so bad," said Florimel, before Mary could check her. "Perhaps we'd mind it more if she seemed like our mother, but we take care of her as if she were a—soap bubble!"

"Will you call mother, please, Florimel?" Mary interposed. "Mel means that we can't help feeling as if some one had sent us something frail from England, to be taken care of; not to be bothered by us, you know, Gladys."

"Of course I know!" Gladys' assent was almost reverent. "She's lovely!"

"So glad to see you, girls!" cried Mrs. Garden, floating into the room, in a thin white gown with pink ribbons, with a lightness of motion that suggested the soap bubble which had occurred to Florimel as the most fragile and beautiful simile that she could use to describe her mother's delicacy. "I have everything laid out in order in the library. It is too warm to enjoy the garden, and Anne has promised us a little treat after you are tired of my pictures." Mrs. Garden laid her hand caressingly on the shoulder of the

girl nearest to her. It was Audrey Dallas, who reddened with delight, raising her eyes adoringly to Mrs. Garden's deep-blue ones, eyes that were bright yet full of appealing pathos.

Mrs. Garden led the way into the library. Tables, the couch, several chairs were stacked with photographs and scrapbooks.

"It must seem queer to you to see so many, but, when one is before the public, photographs are made constantly of her, and I've one of each, at least. And I've kept my press notices, the poems, and all such things written to me. It's great fun; one can't help feeling as if the whole world were one's personal friend, though it's all nonsense, of course." Mrs. Garden had talked, skimming over her trophies to select her point of beginning. Soon she was in full tide of joyous reminiscence. Win and Mark came in quietly, but nobody noticed them beyond a careless glance of welcome. Illustrating her stories with a photograph of herself as a street sweeper, the White Rabbit, the Easter Bunny, a flower, a bird, a little child, in various childish employments; young shop girls, dreaming maidens, Juliet, Rosalind, endless rôles, Mrs. Garden related something funny, exciting, or sad that had befallen her in each of these characterizations.

Her audience laughed till they were weak; or quivered, sharing her danger; or were saddened by her long-dried tears. The gifted little lady herself was in high spirits, reliving her triumphs, seeing again, repeated in this young audience in her American library, the effects she had produced on her mixed audiences in the English halls, theatres, and drawing-rooms. Her voice was gone, but she hummed for them some of her songs, producing by her perfect phrasing, with the words, considerable of the effect her singing had made. She recited for them, and the girls could not contain half their rapture. Her own three girls were entranced. Jane was wrought up to a frenzy of admiring pride in her. Florimel could not repress herself and actually cheered one number, carried beyond remembrance of conventions that forbid mad applause of one's own.

Mary broke down and actually cried at the end of a pretty bit of child pathos. She was completely overwhelmed, and a little aghast, to discover talent, the like of which her inexperience had never encountered, shut up in her own mother's slender body. She felt, as Gladys Low had felt for her, that it was almost past bearing to have such a gifted being one's own mother, living under the same roof.

Win, first of any one, discovered Anne standing with a tray in her hands, which she had forgotten, waiting for the end of a recitation, forgetting that she thus was waiting.

"You lamb!" exclaimed Anne aloud as her beloved lady ended. And the words made every one, Anne included, laugh, and this brought the emotional part of the entertainment to a close.

"But there's no end more that I know!" exclaimed Mrs. Garden naïvely, as she took a lettuce sandwich and welcomed her tea.

"Let me tell you a secret!" said Audrey Dallas, as she, too, accepted a sandwich, but preferred the lemonade as the alternative to tea which Anne had provided. "A New York paper, the *Morning Planet*, takes items which I send it, sometimes, for the Sunday issue."

"Audrey! You *do!* You *do!*" cried Nanette Hall, with varying emphasis, but one emotion of amazement.

"Sometimes, Nan," said Audrey, laughing. "Will you mind if I write about your having come back to America, to Vineclad, where you had lived as a bride, and how you had returned to your career, leaving your children here? And how you were now resting and delighting

your friends, as you had delighted thousands of the English public? You know how they always say those things! And may I say that you were known to the world as Miss Lynette Devon, your maiden name, but in private were Mrs. Elias Garden, the widow of Elias Garden, LL.D., a scholar who had lived an exceedingly private life in Vineclad, New York? And then will you care if I add something about the happiness your talent gives your neighbours when you are kind enough to entertain them? It wouldn't sound like this when I'd written it, you know, but this would be the material I'd use. Would you mind, dear Mrs. Garden?"

"Not in the least," said Mrs. Garden. "It would be rather nice of you, Audrey—I can't call you girls Miss; you're my daughters' friends, you see! Then I'd mail copies of that paper over to England, and people would know I still lived. The London papers could be got to copy it. Oh, girls, sometimes it tears my heart to know I'm laid on the shelf!" Tears sprang into Mrs. Garden's eyes and glistened on her cheeks.

"Steady, Lynette," Win interposed. "Just look at the three jam-and-honey pots you found on the shelf, waiting you here!"

"Oh, I know, Win; I do know, really!" cried the artist. "And I'm happy here, truly! But they used to applaud me so, and call: 'Lynette! Ah, Lynette, our pet! You can do it, you bet!' from the galleries, don't you know; the boys! And the flowers they sent me and the sweets! And it was all as if they liked me, the *me* back of it all, don't you know! One can't help loving all that. But the girls are dear to me, simply *dear* to me! Indeed I'm grateful!"

Mary put her arm around her with the gesture she used when she saw that her fragile mother was overtired.

"We don't 'like' you, Lynette, our pet!" she whispered. "We love you, as all England could never love you."

"We don't send you flowers; we just lay our glorious garden at your feet," said Jane.

"As to sweets and poems and presents, what's that? Look at us; you've got *us* here," Florimel summed up conclusively.

"We think you have all Vineclad, Mrs. Garden," said Audrey. "We girls are simply crazy over you; *crazy*, that's all!"

"Quite enough," interposed Win heartily, tired of this sort of girlish sentimentality. "You

all give Mrs. Garden treacle out of a huge spoon, the way Mrs. Squeers fed it to the boys in the school. I'll walk with you, Audrey, if you're going home, as I see you're making ready to do. I've an errand past your house."

"Got it up after you knew Audrey was to be here, Win?" asked Florimel.

"It's to fetch my shoes, which I left to be straightened by the shoemaker last week, Miss," said Win severely. "Not that it would not be to my credit if I did provide myself with a reason for walking with Audrey."

"With any of us, Win," said Audrey, almost too unconsciously to be unconscious. "Of course the shoes will wait."

Win feigned not to hear this suggestion; he departed with the girls, to turn off with Audrey at her corner.

Mark accepted with alacrity an invitation to stay to tea.

"I wonder if Audrey acts like that just to make Win want to go all the more? Couldn't make me believe she's plain stupid! Isn't it fun to watch 'em? When I'm older, if there's a boy in Vineclad—they're not too plenty, not older ones—I'm going to take in everything that comes my way," announced Florimel,

cramming a round tea cake into her mouth in two bites to free her hands for carrying out teacups.

“You seem to be beginning now, Mel,” Jane commented.

CHAPTER TEN

“’TIS BEAUTY CALLS AND GLORY SHOWS THE WAY”

The old-fashioned methods of the law office in which Win was reading law, combined with the complete lack of such cases as required haste in proceeding with them, made it nearly always possible for Win to arrange his hours, even wholly to be absent at his pleasure. A Vineclad law office, *the* Vineclad law office to be more exact, since the Hammersley & Dallas firm was supreme in its profession there, would have horrified lawyers in a large city, yet the knowledge of the law which Win was gaining in it would be thorough and practical, a fine basis for whatever he should choose to build upon it when he was older. There was no difficulty, therefore, in Win's taking three days in which to go to New York, buy his sister-in-law's car, and select from the applicants who might apply for the position of its chauffeur, in answer to her advertisement, the one whom his judgment decided was the most hopeful.

"If one of the girls could go——" Win checked himself, but there would not be much use in blowing out a match after it had been applied to oil.

Jane and Florimel sprang to their feet, and Mary looked up eagerly.

"But I couldn't possibly go," Mary said, instantly aware of her responsibility as the head of the house, and denying her thought's suggestion.

"Why not Jane, then?" Win hinted, beginning to think that what he had not meant to say was worth saying, after all.

"Well, I'd like to know why not Florimel?" demanded that young person.

"Seniority, my dear, seniority." Win shook his head sadly. "No getting away from the fact that you are younger. Besides, Jane has red hair."

Jane laughed. "It does seem as though that ought to win me a consolation prize! Do you suppose I could go, really?"

"Don't pretend, Janie! You love your hair, but then we all do!" said Mary. "Might she go, Win? Where would you stay?"

"In the park, in the aquarium, in the station house, or, at a pinch, in a hotel," replied Win, still unsmiling. "I don't see why Jane mightn't

go. I'm timid about going alone—you have to go under rivers and over houses in New York too much to be unprotected."

"Oh, Win, I think you're lovely!" Jane cried rapturously.

"So do I, Jane; I'm glad we agree so. We ought to have a great trip, having the same tastes," assented Win.

"It sounds decided!" Jane exclaimed. "Is it? Do you think it is, Mary? I wouldn't need more than one little gown to wear in the evening and some extra shirt waists; just a small suitcase."

"If we got the car, plus the driver, we might—we should come home in it," observed Win.

Jane gave a little scream of joy, but Florimel's desire broke bounds. "And there'd be plenty of room for me, *plenty!*" she cried, choking and tripping over her words. "It would be a great deal more—more proper for Jane and me to be walking around the hotel together. Who'd be with her when you were seeing cars and men? And Jane needs some one sensible! Look at the day she went off to see that Miss Aldine! Didn't I go with her, and wasn't it better? Jane and I would have one room, and I'd just as lief eat half of what I could eat; it wouldn't be much more

expensive. I'll use my own money. Why couldn't I go, too? Jane's only two years older than I am. And I'm fully as able to enjoy a trip, and really a great deal more sensible."

"But altogether too modest, Florimel; it's a pity you don't see your own good points," said Win mournfully. "It isn't economy I'm aiming at, child. I couldn't seem to see myself kidnapping the Garden baby. If you want to come along, and your mother and Mary and Anne can spare you both at once, come along. I'd be glad to take you both, and Mary, and the twin of each of you—if you were twins."

"Mary, for goodness' sake, say quick you won't mind for just three days!" Florimel implored Mary, on her knees before her, arms around Mary's waist in an instant.

"I won't mind for just three days," repeated Mary obediently. "But——"

"Stop right there!" screamed Florimel, springing up and catching Jane in a mad whirl. "Oh, Jane, oh, Jane, how do you feel? We're going to New York for an automobile!" Florimel sang as she and Jane danced a sort of gallop around the room.

"I want to dance and shriek and purr! We're going to buy a car and chauffeur," Jane continued

the doggerel, on a still higher key, as they started off again.

Mrs. Garden came running downstairs and Anne hurried in from the dining-room.

"What is it? You quite frightened me!" gasped Mrs. Garden, leaning against the casement of the door, her hand at her side, as she saw that the girls were at least not sorrowful.

"I knew it was only Jane or Florimel gone stark mad; it's both of them," said Anne, with the annoyance relief always seems to call forth. Florimel and Jane released each other and caught their mother into their embrace.

"Win's going to let us go with him to get the car," announced Florimel. "Mary says it's all right——" Florimel stopped, hesitated, fell back, and looked at her mother doubtfully. "You don't care if we go, do you?" she said slowly. "Somehow we never think of asking you things like that. We shall after we get you looking to us like our mother. You don't care? If we go, I mean?"

"Of course not. And I'd rather you wouldn't ask me things like that; it would be embarrassing to betray how little I knew about what was best for you," said Mrs. Garden, half pettishly. "I should think it would be very pleasant for you

to go—and an awful nuisance to Win to take you.”

“Why, *madrina!*” said Jane reproachfully. “When we’re such good company and Win has known us so long! The way we’ve worked for that boy and entertained him! He’s the nuisance. I’ve worked over him for years; I’m glad that he feels grateful enough to do a little for us!” Jane waltzed over to Win and took him by the ears and swung his head gently from side to side as she hummed and danced a slow waltz, in which he had no choice but to follow her, captured as he was.

The result of this sudden resolution on Win’s part to escort his almost-contemporaneous nieces to New York was that they set out on the second day in high glee, accompanied to the station by Mr. and Mrs. Moulton, Mrs. Garden, Mary, and Anne. Mark also was of the party and insisted upon carrying their suitcase.

“I do hope everything will go right,” said Mary, as the travellers’ escort walked slowly homeward through the vineclad streets, pleasantly shady in the July heat.

“Oh, Win can’t go wrong, with the car picked out at home! If he engages an unsatisfactory man, we aren’t obliged to keep him,” said Mrs.

Garden. "How frightfully warm it is! We never have such intemperate heat at home in England."

Involuntarily Mary's troubled eyes met Mr. and Mrs. Moulton's, regarding her kindly.

"Mary was anxious about the children, not the car, Mrs. Garden—Lynette," said Mrs. Moulton.

"Mary is an anxious little hen in the Garden patch," laughed her mother.

"I'm sure I don't know what could happen to two such great girls as Jane and Florimel."

"Of course nothing could happen to them, with Win another clucking hen, as bad as I am!" cried Mary, visibly glad to seize upon this reason for her youthful mother's refusing to be anxious about the girls.

A telegram announcing the arrival of her trio in New York, giving the address which would connect them by the magic wire with home and Vineclad, comforted inexperienced Mary by anchoring her thoughts of them to a definite spot, out of the space which had swallowed them up.

The four girls—Dorothy, Nanette, Gladys, and Audrey—came to tea one day; Mr. and

Mrs. Moulton invited Mrs. Garden and Mary to tea with them on another of the three days of Mary's loneliness. On the third Chum got a bone crosswise down her throat and it took so long to save her from imminent death, the adventure was so exciting, that the whole day seemed filled and curtailed by it. Consequently the time of the New York visit really did not seem long although it overlapped into the fourth day. A telephone message came from Win announcing that they were staying overnight, some sixty miles from home, held up by a puncture and too tired to press on.

Mary was up early the next morning, out in the garden to look after her pets and to make their dawn toilets by pulling weeds and clipping dead leaves, when a long graceful car, its size unobstrusive because of its good lines and true proportions, came up the side street, blew its horn at her several times, by way of salute, and stopped at the gate.

"Thought you'd be here!" shouted Win, as the engine stopped to allow him to speak. He sprang down from his place beside the chauffeur and opened the tonneau door to let out Jane and Florimel, who were pushing it madly but ineffectively. Florimel carried a basket to which

she clung so devotedly that Mary was at once suspicious of it. In spite of it, she managed to hug Mary as hard as Jane did, and both embraced her as if it were she who had just returned, and from a journey of desperate danger.

"You old blessing!" cried Jane. "I've felt like a pig, a perfect pig, every minute! The next time I go anywhere you can't go, let me know! I've been furious to think of it; Mel, too! You just said you couldn't go, and we fell right in with it, and you could have gone as well as not! I'm a pig!"

"You won't get another chance to come your unselfishness, Mary Garden," Florimel corroborated her sister. "But we had a perfectly scrumptious time. Where's Chum, and how's mother?"

"Chum's around somewhere; mother's well. Chum nearly choked to death," replied Mary, holding tight to Win, because she could not get a chance to do more than look her welcome to him and pat the back of his hand, which had been Mary's way of petting Win since she was a baby.

"No word for the new car, Molly?" hinted Win. "Some car! It brought us home in great shape; I've almost mastered running it; it isn't hard. I'm going to teach you three."

"Indeed you're not; not me!" cried Mary.

"But it's a beauty, Win! It looks even better in the body than it does in the pictures!"

"Looks better in the chassis, too!" laughed Win. "We made no mistake in our selection. Captured a chauffeur, too. Come and speak to him. Say, Mary, he's a wonder; English, seems an out-and-out gentleman; I don't understand him," Win whispered, as Mary went with him to the gate to greet this acquisition.

"Willoughby, this is the eldest of the three young ladies, Miss Garden. Mary, this is Willoughby, Wilfrid Willoughby, who drives splendidly and is going to look after us this summer," Win introduced the new chauffeur.

Willoughby bowed; then, as if he remembered, touched his cap with his forefinger in the groom's salute. "Hope I may be allowed to look after you, Miss Garden," he said, in the unmistakable accent of an English university man. He wore a close black beard and his eyebrows were inky black; Mary thought it gave him a queer effect. His eyes were the bluest blue.

"Probably has Irish blood," thought Mary, sorting out her impressions of him.

"Take the car around—no; what am I thinking of? Of course Mrs. Garden must see it. She's not down yet, Mary?" asked Win.



““ MARY, THIS IS WILFRID WILLOUGHBY, WHO DRIVES SPLENDIDLY AND IS
GOING TO LOOK AFTER US THIS SUMMER ’”

“No, but I’m sure she’ll not be long. I’ll tell her you’ve come. I’m so glad you’re back, you three! I wonder what I should do if I had to be separated from you long? Florimel, what is in that basket?” Mary stopped and looked reproachfully at Florimel, for the basket unmistakably wriggled in a most unnatural way.

“It was lost, Mary!” cried Florimel. “It rubbed up against us in the street. Jane said we mustn’t let it rub, or its bones would prick right through, it is so thin. But it will be beautiful when it’s fed and petted a little while. It was so grateful! Win went into a restaurant and bought one of those terrible thick saucers, like a scooped-out cobblestone, and some warm milk, and fed it right in a convenient to-let doorway, in the street. And it was so hungry it shook so it could hardly eat, and so grateful when it had taken it all up! We stood around it, of course, keeping off frights from it. Jane said if we left it, we’d be worse than the cruel uncles of the Babes in the Wood, for there wasn’t the ghost of a chance for it, not even of robins covering it, if it died in the street! And we all said one more in Vineclad, and this big place, would never be noticed, so we bought this basket and we took it back to the hotel and smuggled

it in, and Win bribed the chambermaid to help us, and she did, and it has ridden up here as contented as we were! Even when Willoughby let the car out, to show what it could do, it never minded a speck! So I knew you'd be glad we came along and saved one starving thing! If everybody saved just one, there wouldn't be one left to suffer! Isn't that a hard thing to know, when they won't do it?"

"You certainly expect your hearers to sort out sentences, Mellie!" cried Mary.

Willoughby, apparently without consciousness that his position forbade such comment, said:

"My word, she's a charming child! We've had a great time with Miss Florimel and her protégée in the basket, coming up!"

Mary had an instant in which to wonder at this freedom in a well-trained English servant, as she said:

"I suppose it's a cat, Florimel? You haven't said, you know."

"Silver-gray ground colour; broad black stripes!" cried Florimel. "It will be a beauty. Win pretended coming up he heard the wind rattle its bones through the basket, and that he thought some one was stoning the car, but you'll

see what a dream it will be! Say you're glad we saved it, Mary!"

"I don't have to say that, Mel; you know anybody would be, especially our sort. Take it in the house—or shall I?—and feed it and butter its paws—especially feed it. It ought to have a name," said Mary.

"It has—Lucky," announced Florimel, rushing past Mary to take her sufferer to Anne, to see whom she could not wait another instant.

Mrs. Garden was dressed and almost ready to go down when Mary called her.

"I heard the horn, and knew they had come, and jumped right up!" she cried. "Do, pray, fasten my gown here at the shoulder, Mary. Am I properly put together? I'll never learn to dress myself, and one must be gowned half-way right to be seen by one's new manservant. Does he look all one could ask, Mary?"

"He looks queer. I don't mean precisely that; he's really nice, speaks like an educated man, but his face doesn't quite belong to him," said Mary, groping for her own meaning.

"Dear me, how extraordinary!" laughed her mother. "I sincerely hope he has not been dismissed from his last place for stealing a face! I'm ready, Mary."

Mrs. Garden, who never looked prettier nor more youthful than in the simple pink and white morning gown which she was wearing that morning, did not at first see the new chauffeur; her rapture over the car excluded all other objects. Win drew her attention to the man after she had rhapsodized over the car.

"This is Willoughby, the new man, Lynette. Willoughby, this is Mrs. Garden, who is actually your employer."

Willoughby touched his cap with a hand that shook noticeably, though this time he made no mistaken salute. Mrs. Garden looked him over languidly, then with a mystified, increasing attention.

"You remind me of some one," she said. "Could it be that you drove for any one I know? Have you been in England?"

"Yes, madam, I am English," said Willoughby. And again Mrs. Garden looked closely at him, a puzzled line contracting her smooth brow.

"It may be that you drove for one of my friends. I must have you tell me where you were employed there," she said. "Mary, shall we try the car? Have you breakfasted, Willoughby? Then suppose you drive us—Miss

Garden and me—about three miles? Enough to try the car, then you shall have a second breakfast. Will you come, Jane? Win?”

“No thank you, Lynette; I must hurry down to the office,” said Win.

“No, thank you, madrina; I want to see Anne and Abbie,” said Jane.

So Mary, who had run back to the house for coats and veils, got into the car with her mother, the chauffeur played with various buttons, and they rolled away. The car was a model, one of the glories of its first rank. It bore them along rapidly, steadily, purring softly, obedient to each suggestion, and Mrs. Garden was in raptures.

“Have you driven long, Willoughby? You drive perfectly, with caution, yet certainty,” Mrs. Garden said, as they slowed down after a little exhibition speeding on a deserted road.

“I’ve driven since cars were made worth driving,” he said, forgetting his respectful “madam,” and turning his head with a little toss of it; his blood was kindled by the swift flight of the car through the dewy morning. To Mary’s utter amazement and alarm her mother cried out in surprise and leaning forward touched “Willoughby” on the shoulder.

“I know you now!” she cried. “Lord Wil-

frid Kelmscourt, what are you doing driving my car, here in Vineclad?"

"Willoughby" stopped the engine and turned to face the tonneau. "I'm doing just that, driving your car, here in Vineclad, in New York, in the United States of America, and I admit it is most amazing," he said.

"Why are you wearing those ridiculous whiskers?" Mrs. Garden cried, and Mary sat dumfounded.

"I didn't think you'd find me out, not at once," "Willoughby" said plaintively.

"How childish you are!" Mrs. Garden said, half laughing, yet evidently annoyed. "Pray tell me how you found me, and why you came here in this silly fashion?"

"Miss Lynette Devon—Mrs. Garden—didn't you order me not to come where you were again?" asked this extraordinary masquerading chauffeur. "Very well; I came to America, not knowing you were coming here, because it was hard on me to stay in England and not see you. I saw an item in a Sunday paper in New York last week saying you were in Vineclad, New York; known in private life as Mrs. Elias Garden."

"Oh, Audrey's correspondence!" interrupted Mrs. Garden.

“Really, I don’t know,” said “Willoughby,” with his strongest Oxford accent. “In another sheet I saw that you were advertising for a man to drive your car, that ‘Mrs. Elias Garden, in Vineclad,’ sought a man who would drive for her and take care of a garden. ‘My word, Wilfrid, my boy,’ I said to myself, ‘there’s your chance to get into Miss Devon’s presence and be near her for a few days, at least, undiscovered!’ I applied for the position, your brother-in-law selected me out of several applicants—he’s a discerning young chap, that brother of yours!—and I had the pleasure of bringing up your new car, your two lovely children—and of seeing you! Lynette, Miss Devon—oh, bother these names!—Mrs. Garden, won’t you forgive me and let me stay?”

“As my chauffeur? Hardly, Lord Wilfrid! And certainly not as my guest. Kindly drive us home and let me speed your departure, after you have breakfasted with us. If you were determined to disobey my distinct prohibition to see me again, whatever did you do it for so foolishly? Why didn’t you call on me, like a sensible man?” asked Mrs. Garden, with reason.

“Because I’m not sensible about you! Because I thought this would prove to what length

I was willing to go to get into your presence! Because it was so unusual, so removed from the commonplace. Doesn't the romance appeal to you, Lynette Devon Garden?" Lord Wilfrid pleaded.

"It certainly does not!" cried Mrs. Garden, breaking into laughter, in which Mary struggled not to join.

Without a word Lord Wilfrid reached forward and started the engine. He seemed to realize that from laughter there is no appeal. In unbroken silence, but with undiminished skill, he drove them home to the old Garden house. Mary began to feel that he was in earnest in his feeling for her mother and, tender-hearted ever, to pity him. She longed to hear the story of his woes. But, glancing at her mother's pretty unruffled face, which looked young and contented under its shadowy veil, she felt that if admirers were coming to seek her out, titled admirers from across seas, her hands would be full indeed. How should she and Jane, not to speak of Florimel, take care of a girl-mother whom lords sought, when they were all too young to think of romance, except when it was presented to them within book covers, its aroma one with printers' ink?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“HE NOTHING COMMON DID OR MEAN”

“Lord Wilfrid,” “Willoughby,” “the chauffeur,” “the nobleman”—Mary found herself experimenting in her thoughts with the various guises in which this man should appear in them—drove up to the other gate of the Garden place and into the driving entrance. Mary guided him; her mother had wrapped herself in a silence more impenetrable than her motor veil, but Mary felt sure that she was enjoying herself exceedingly.

“The lordly chauffeur,” as Mary amused herself by deciding to call him to herself, stopped the car, shut off the gas, and the engine sank into silence. He then got out, opened the tonneau door, and handed out the elder and younger ladies with a courtesy equalled only by his extreme gravity.

“You are to come in, Lord Wilfrid,” said Mrs. Garden, passing him up the steps.

Mary really felt sorry for him. “He hasn’t

done anything except be foolish, and I suppose that's to be expected if he's in love," she thought generously. "We have not breakfasted, Lord Kelmscourt," she said, with her smile that everybody found comforting. "I hope you are a little hungry, or we shall be embarrassed; it is late for us, in summer. We shall have great appetites."

Lord Wilfrid Kelmscourt proved no exception to the rule; he quite brightened as he received Mary's sympathetic look.

"I'm not particularly sharp set, Miss Garden," he said. "We had a good breakfast, your brother—your uncle, is it? How curious!—and I. But I've no doubt I still can peck a bit."

"That's a suitable thing to do when you're coming into a Garden domain!" laughed Mary. "We have such a useful name! It makes itself into little mild jokes all the time." She threw off her close straw hat and brushed up her damp hair, which its pressure had made into small rings of glossy brown on her forehead.

The romantic lord, who for romance's sake was ready to become such an unromantic person as a begoggled chauffeur, in a long, shapeless coat, looked admiringly at Mary.

"Fancy your being Miss Lynette Devon's

daughter!" he exclaimed. "Fancy her having three such beautiful daughters as she has, and not one in the least like her charming self! I can't believe you are really her child!"

Mary looked around and saw that her mother had gone on up to her room.

"Well," thought Mary loyally, "if she won't encourage him, at least there's no use in letting him think she's old and undesirable! She doesn't seem one bit like my mother to me either," she said aloud. "She was such a young girl when I was born that she is like another sister, but one that we all feel we must take more care of than we ever did of our other two sisters. She is young, of course, but she's young in other ways than years."

"Quite right, Miss Garden!" Lord Wilfrid agreed heartily. He came close to Mary, speaking low and earnestly.

"Don't you see that I long to take care of her myself? Don't you think she needs a man's protection? You would not oppose me if I tried to win her, would you? Can't you see why I took this work to be near her?"

Mary moved away, nervously longing to laugh yet wishing to be kind to this strange being. "I can't help feeling that we can take care of

my mother, Mr.—Lord Kelmscourt. But, of course, if you were fond of her you'd want to do it yourself. You couldn't expect us really to be willing to lose her, now we've had her, could you? I'm sure we should try not to be selfish. And any one can understand wanting to be near her—but—goggles, Lord Kelmscourt? Wouldn't almost anything else be nicer? Goggles look so much like a huge insect! Of course you haven't them on now, but when you wore them—they aren't a bit romantic!" Mary had kept her face sober while she answered this guest categorically, but murmuring something about "seeing Anne," she fairly ran away at last, to laugh her fill in the hall.

Here Win came upon her and she fairly clutched him.

"Oh, Win, I was afraid you'd gone to the office!" Mary cried.

"Found it was earlier than I thought and that I needed another breakfast," Win explained. "What's up, Molly? Why are your risibles risen?"

"Win, he's not a chauffeur! He's Lord Wilfrid Kelmscourt; he's in love with our little mother! He saw her advertisement and took the place to be near her—says he thought the

romance would strike her! She'd forbidden him to see her in England, you know. But he happened to be over here, and he saw her advertisement and applied. He's disguised a little; has a beard! Mother knew him almost at once. Did you ever in all your life hear anything like it? Please take him up to your room to get ready for breakfast."

"Say, Mary, you're not nutty for keeps, are you? It's only temporary, isn't it? And did they say it was safe for you to be at large? They often attack their best friends, you know, suddenly! Keep off, Mary, and explain what has done this?" Win sat down on the reception chair, back of the door, and held out his hands, palms outermost, fending off Mary.

"Oh, Win, dear, don't fool now!" cried Mary, laughing, but ready to cry. "He's in there alone. Do look after him and be polite! He's a guest now, and he's to be sent right away, so do be polite while he lasts! I have told you; that's the truth, just as I said it. Please hurry in, Win; you'll sort it out when you get there. He's Lord Wilfrid Kelmscourt; don't forget the name." Mary pulled Win to his feet by his coat lapels and pushed him toward the room she had just left. Win arose with a groan and

suffered himself to be propelled to his amazing duty.

“Well, my gracious, as they say in Barrie’s stories: ‘It cows a’! It certainly cows a’! Though I never knew what that barnyard Scotticism meant, nor do I know what has befallen our family, through this chauffeur who isn’t one! He must be pretty long-sighted, since they had to forbid him in England from seeing Lynette over here! I hope to goodness you’ll get all right again, poor Molly!” When Win had disappeared through the doorway, shaking his head forebodingly for Mary’s benefit, Mary fled to find Anne and Jane and Florimel to warn them what they had to expect from him who had been the chauffeur, and that he was to breakfast with them.

Jane and Florimel, Anne, too, in her way, instantly caught fire from Mary’s stirring tidings.

“It’s a novel, a play going on right here in this house!” cried Florimel, her eyes snapping. “What a lark! As long as she doesn’t want him, isn’t it great?”

“She probably will want him,” said Jane. “It *is* like a novel, and in novels they always relent at the end. We’ll lose her! Lady Kelms-

court she'll be! We'll be presented at court by her. 'Lady Kelmscourt wore violet and point lace; Miss Garden wore Alice blue'—that wouldn't do, not if the dresses were together! White! 'Miss Jane Garden wore canary yellow; Miss Florimel Garden wore rose pink. The young ladies' court trains were——'"

"Jane, for pity's sake!" protested Mary, covering her ears.

"Miss Devon had plenty of admirers before she married and came here; lords, aplenty!" Anne said proudly. But she looked troubled. "It's not the same now. She was a slip of a girl then, hardly older than Jane, and it was all a play to her; didn't interest her greatly. But now—if she's forbidden this Lord Kelmscourt to follow her, and he's come in spite of it, mark my words you may lose your lovely girl-mother, and I my sweet lady again!"

"Anne, don't croak!" Mary remonstrated. "We've got to be polite to him at breakfast, and we can't be if we think he's going to steal our little toy-mother! I'm sure he won't; she meant just what she said."

Anne sniffed. "Much you could tell of what a woman meant!" she said. "Where's your mother now?"

"In her room," admitted Mary unwillingly.

"Making herself bewitching! What did I tell you?" cried Anne.

Mrs. Garden floated into the dining-room in a perfectly irresistible gown, which none of her daughters had seen before. It was all foaming pinks and white, with irruptive lace and bows of three shades of pink nestling in it, and it had an absurd cap to enhance it, that looked, on Mrs. Garden's soft light hair, as if she had brushed against the dawn and a bit of a pink and white cloud had clung to her head.

"Does look as if Anne were right! If she isn't, it's rather mean to make it harder for him," Jane whispered to Mary, while Lord Wilfrid was helping Mrs. Garden to her chair with a look that proved the wonderful morning costume not lost upon him. He, too, was wonderfully transformed by shaving and the loss of the disguising beard.

Mrs. Garden was sweetly gracious, a charming hostess. She smiled upon Lord Wilfrid and asked about acquaintances they shared in London, how his mother, Lady Kelmscourt's eyes were; she hoped they were better. Whether his sister, the Honourable Clara, had long felt ill effects from that ugly fall from her horse? And

whether her darling little boy, Ralph, was growing strong and big?

The Garden girls could not eat much for listening to these familiar quotations from novels, as the talk sounded to them, and also feeling that they were taking part in private theatricals. But Lord Kelmscourt seemed to consider it all perfectly natural, as indeed it was, for acquaintances meeting after separation ordinarily inquire for common friends; it was an accident that these people bore titles which made them seem unreal to the three Vineclad maidens. Mary noted with satisfaction that Lord Wilfrid did not eat like a blighted being. He did full justice to the excellent breakfast, undaunted by its predecessor of that morning.

Breakfast over, Win hesitated, looking painfully embarrassed. He did not want to betray his knowledge of what Mary had told him, that his sister-in-law had ordained that this genuine and attractive Englishman was not to remain her guest. On the other hand, Win did not want to leave the house without bidding him good-bye. Mary alone noticed that Win was in a quandary, and was turning over in her mind ways of solving his difficulty, when Lord Wilfrid ended it.

“Are you off, Mr. Garden? You said before breakfast that you must hasten to the office; I gather that you are reading law? Now my disguise has proved so flimsy that your sister penetrated it immediately, and I must return to New York. I should be glad if I might linger in Vineclad, but the decree has gone forth I must also go forth! Awfully glad to have met you, Mr. Garden; hope to see you again. When you come over, look me up in London, if we don’t meet here. I had a delightful drive up here with you and the little girls—I beg their pardon: the young ladies! Here’s my card; that club will always give you an address to reach me.” Lord Kelmscourt shook hands with painful heartiness, clasping Win’s hand till it hurt him.

“Oh, I think I’ll see you again here; I hope so,” Win could not help saying, with unmistakable sincerity. He thoroughly liked this man, whose forty years should have been a barrier between them, but who was forty years young, and companionable to the youth of not much more than half his age.

“Shall I see your young brother-in-law again in America, Mrs. Garden?” Lord Wilfrid appealed to his hostess openly.

"It would be quite like you," she said with a smile. "But if you do come to Vineclad again, pray come in your proper person."

"No objection to that, as long as you do not find my proper person improper," laughed Lord Wilfrid, evidently relieved at not receiving a stern prohibition to return to Vineclad in any guise.

Win got his hat, Lord Kelmscourt went out to the door, and here the elder and younger man shook hands and said good-bye all over again.

"Nice boy," Lord Wilfrid said, turning to Mary, who happened to be near him. "Though, speaking of your uncle, I suppose one should call him a man!"

"He's only a half-uncle, my father's half-brother. It's the other half that is a man; at home Win is only a dear big boy."

"I'm going immediately, Mrs. Garden," said Lord Wilfrid, as Mrs. Garden joined them, anticipating her possible orders. "Before I go, please show me your garden."

"Come, Mary," said Mrs. Garden, but Mary's heart failed her when she remembered that Lord Wilfrid had not seen her mother for a moment, except in the car and at the table.

"I've got to find Jane, madrina," she said, blind to her mother's appeal to be supported. And she ran away not a little perturbed. For perhaps Lord Kelmscourt would seize the chance which she had given him, and plead his cause, and perhaps Mrs. Garden would relent! Mary trembled to think that her girl-mother might go the way of girls, and leave her new-found daughters desolate.

When, an hour later, Mrs. Garden and her guest returned to the house, Mary, Jane, and Florimel, watching anxiously behind the closed blinds of the upper hall, clutched one another jubilantly. Lord Wilfrid looked serious, far from glad, and their mother was as blithely unruffled as ever.

"Poor lord!" said Jane, with a revulsion of feeling; she had been hating the stranger with all her dynamic force. "She's held on to her orders, and made him go back to New York! Of course I'm thankful, but you can see he isn't."

"Well, I think it's perfectly great to have a lover, provided you send him off! I like something like this going on in the house, as long as it goes the wrong way—for him," declared Florimel.

Mary and Jane were convulsed over this

speech and responded to their mother's summons to bid Lord Kelmscourt good-bye with lips that would twitch, and with cheeks reddened by amusement over Florimel's original views of a romance.

"Good-bye, Miss Garden, good-bye, Miss Jane Garden. Good-bye, Miss Florimel Gypsy! We had a pleasant trip, we four, in the car, didn't we? I'm sorry not to teach you to drive it, Miss Jane. Mr. Garden will do that. I hope to see you again. I'm to be allowed to visit Vineclad before I sail for home, 'if I like.' Do you think I shall not 'like,' Mary?" Lord Wilfrid said, not noticing that he had dropped his more formal address to Mary, won by the kindly blue eyes in the sweet young face smiling at him.

"I'm sure that you will come and that we shall all be glad to see you," said Mary.

"You dear girl!" said Lord Kelmscourt, with a farewell grip of Mary's soft hand that underscored his words.

Mr. and Mrs. Moulton came over to Hollyhock house that night, as they usually did, to sit in the garden, now rioting with midsummer bloom, for the beneficent hours of the first darkness after a warm day. They heard the story

of the disguised chauffeur with the amusement that the girls knew that he would feel, on Mr. Moulton's part, and the impatience which they were equally sure his wife would feel.

"Such nonsense!" she cried. "I'm glad you sent him right about, Lynette!"

"Oh, but he will come back!" protested Mrs. Garden mischievously, swung to the other side by this injudicious remark.

"I think he was a trump!" said Mark, who always came when the Moultons did, and just as surely when they did not. "He's got the right idea; better be original, if it isn't too sensible. You've got to remember him now, and talk about him, and maybe that was what he was after."

"Well, Mark!" exclaimed Mrs. Moulton. "Where did you learn your wisdom?"

"Tell you some day!" laughed Mark, flushing.

That night the three Garden girls got together in Mary's bedroom and sat down in their white nightgowns to a serious talk.

"It isn't so much that I think madrina will marry this lordly chauffeur, but the thing is she isn't safe! Some one else will see her and fall in love with her, just as the girls have, just as

we have! For she was a total stranger to us, just as much! I'll never feel easy again—though Chum is getting to be a watch dog!" So spoke Jane, rocking herself comfortably on the floor, with a foot in each hand, wrapped around in her gown, and her glorious hair shining around her.

Florimel stretched herself across the foot of Mary's bed, holding up her arms to let the breeze blow up her flowing sleeves. "It would be bad enough if you or Mary were grown up and—if you were grown up, and anybody noticed it, and—and liked you, Jane," she said delicately. "But, well, I do hope *madrina* won't be too pretty—for us to keep, I mean."

"I think Lord Kelmscourt is nice, really very nice," said Mary. "I think, here in Vineclad, where everybody is either old, married, or uninteresting, and half the time all three, *madrina* will be safe enough, if she doesn't care for the lordly chauffeur. I must say he is really nice; Win thinks so, too. And being English, *madrina* may enjoy being Lady Kelmscourt more than we can think. I'm frightened, that's the truth, but I won't worry. If it happens I'm going to like it, however I don't!" Mary checked herself with a laugh at her own heroism.

“What a thing it is to have a pretty little toy-mother! It’s a great responsibility!” said Jane, jesting, yet in earnest. “Three maiden ladies and their caged linnet!”

Florimel bounced over to the head of the bed with a movement so swift that she seemed to lie at both ends of the bed at once. “How do you suppose she got on in England, while we were little?” she asked, and after this sensible and pertinent suggestion there was nothing to do but to go to bed. The meeting was over for that night.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“AND LEARN THE LUXURY OF DOING GOOD”

Jane came upon Florimel, busy with Chum on the lawn.

“I don’t think either of them likes it, but it’s good for them, teaches them patience and makes them accomplished,” Florimel volunteered for Jane’s benefit as she came up.

“Them? Who besides Chum?” asked Jane, looking around.

“Oh, my! He must have run into the currant hedge!” cried Florimel. “I meant Lucky. I was teaching him to ride on Chum’s back. He sticks on pretty well, but he hates it. Sticks too well; his claws rather annoy Chum.”

“I don’t know why they wouldn’t!” Jane sympathized with Chum. “I see Lucky’s nose poking out under there, to see if it’s safe to come out. Do let him alone, Mel! You bothered Chum’s life out, and now the cat has no peace. Such a pretty cat as he’s turned out!”

“Didn’t we know he would?” triumphed Florimel. “Those black stripes on his silver colour are so stylish! If I do torment them, Chum and Lucky like me better than any one; don’t you, Chum pup?” Florimel hugged Chum breathless and the dog plainly was ecstatic over her condescension. “I’m teaching Lucky to come when I whistle, like a dog, only not the same call I use for Chum. Watch!” Florimel whistled two notes, repeated like a bird call, and Lucky, whose added flesh and beauty proved his name suitable, came pleasantly to her, not with any of Chum’s joy at being noticed, but with a slow, condescending courtesy. “He’s the Prince and the Pauper, all in one, like Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” cried Florimel, snatching Lucky to her breast and eagerly scratching his chin to win a purr. “He was the pauper, and now he’s the prince, and you’d think he had been the President and his cabinet, and lived on the best the White House could give him all his life! He likes me lots, but he knows I’m just as lucky as he is to be allowed to save him. I don’t care! I like to be snubbed—by a cat! See this act.”

Florimel set Lucky on Chum’s back, ordered Chum to “Get up!” and for a glorious six or

seven feet of distance Chum served Lucky as his steed, to the disgust of both. Then the cat growled and sprang off, this time galloping to the house with tail a-hoop, resolved not to be cajoled by a whistle again to do what he despised, and Chum wagged her whole body apologetically, reminding Florimel that, though she objected to circus performances, it was the cat who had broken bounds.

“Mel, little madrina longs for a chauffeur,” said Jane. “She says no matter how well you and I could drive, she’d never ride with either of us, and Win can’t give up the law altogether. Where shall we get a man?”

“I think we’re both learning beautifully, Janie!” said Florimel, in an injured tone. “I haven’t done a thing wrong since the day I went into the garage without putting down the brake—and the brake was spelled another way, by the wind-shield and the wall! You’ve got to do something like that to start with; they all do! You haven’t done anything yet, but you may; you drive better than I do, though. You don’t seem a bit red-haired when you drive, Jane, honest! You’re just as quiet and clear-headed, you’re not afraid, and you’re not reckless,—not smarty-cat! I think you drive plenty well

enough for madrina to trust you, if you take a little longer training."

"Much obliged, Mel, for your compliments," said Jane. "It's nice of you to say all that, when you want to drive so badly. I think, myself, I'd be safe driving here in Vineclad, but if madrina's nervous, she's nervous, and that's all there is to be said about it. It seems to me madrina's painfully quiet lately; I'm afraid she's getting tired of it—*tired*! It must take a while to realize one's voice is gone, and the further you get into realizing it, the worse it is, of course. We thought—Mary and I—that we ought to find a man to-day, but 'that's all the further we got,' as Abbie says."

"Let's get out the car and drive all around for ten miles, on every side, blowing the horn, with a sign standing up on the back seat: 'Man wanted to run this!'" suggested Florimel.

Mary came running out of the house. "Janie, Florimel! Abbie thinks, maybe, she knows a man!" she cried.

"I doubt it!" Jane promptly commented. "Abbie doesn't look as though she would know one, ever; she looks as though she'd slaughter one if he were introduced to her."

"She doesn't know this one, personally,"

Mary admitted. "But she has just thought of somebody named Joel Bell who might answer. She is sure he doesn't know how to drive, but she says he's fine at general work, especially gardening, and *madrina* wants that, too. Abbie thinks this Joel is bright, and could learn to run the car. There's one thing certain: he could wash it!"

"What happens?" asked Jane, knowing Mary and that she had a plan. "Do we go out in the car hunting him? Do you suppose he's a boo-jum snark? If he is, there's no use hunting him."

"We are going this evening; *madrina* would like to go with us. Win will take us, some of us—all of us, if we want to go, of course. I thought it would be nice to take Abbie, as long as it's her exploration. She doesn't have much fun," said Mary.

"Fine to take Abbie, Molly darling! But if she goes it's a good thing it's a seven passenger car. Her sixth is equal to two fractions," Jane remarked.

"I would never imagine that *madrina* would take a man to train as a chauffeur! I'm already considerably trained, and she's afraid with me. She ought to have a good driver, else why not trust to Jane?"

"Jane can't repair punctures, change tires, nor pump them up. Madrina feels safer with a man; I do, too, Janie; if you don't mind? There's something in seeing a man's hands on the wheel that gives you a sense of security. Perhaps it's only because men have held steering wheels so long! Yet muscle does count." Mary looked her apology to Jane.

"If any woman could be a more reckless and generally good for nothing driver than some men!" exclaimed Jane disgustedly.

"Janie," said Mary, lowering her voice and glancing toward the house, "madrina is so blue! I came upon her crying her heart out a little while ago. She would not tell me what was wrong, but I heard her trying to sing before that, and her voice is quite, quite gone! It's the first time she has done more than hum. She couldn't sing at all!"

"No need of asking why she cried, then!" said Jane, with a quiver in her own voice. "I thought she was sad lately and I wondered if Lord Kelmscourt had anything to do with it. Of course she didn't have to send him away, but his coming must have brought back her old life to her."

"Well," said Florimel, with an expression

that might have suited a maiden in the Roman colosseum, with the lion pit just opened before her, "if madrina wants the lordly chauffeur, not to drive for her but to travel with her all the rest of her life I, for one, am not going to make a fuss. I thought I couldn't stand it to have her marry him and go away again, even if we did visit her; we'd not go to England for good and leave our garden. But I will stand it; I'll write him, myself, to come back, if she's sorry she made him go."

"He's coming to Vineclad before he sails. Madrina isn't so silly! She wants to sing. Can't you see, Florimel, how fearful it is to be what she was; and then to be nothing—oh, I don't mean that! The dear, little, charming madrina! But nothing the world knows about; just the Garden girls' mother!" cried Jane.

"We all see, Janie," said Mary sadly. "I've been thinking. Isn't there something, some charity, for which we could raise money?"

Jane and Florimel stared at her. "Vineclad is pretty comfortable, you know; not much chance here to work for charity," said Jane slowly. "Why, in all this wide world, did you say that, Mary? You've something in your brain; I know you!"

“You can’t know me very well, if you don’t think my brain is empty, Janie,” laughed Mary. “I was thinking that if we could get up an entertainment, for an object—you can’t seem to have entertainments just to entertain!—madrina might be interested. She could give some of her impersonations, in those costumes the girls were so crazy about, and she could train the girls—be deep in it, in all sorts of ways. I believe it would be good for her.”

Jane and Florimel were in raptures. “For all of us!” they cried together.

“Oh, Molly darling, what a good head you’d make for a sanitarium! You’d know just what to do for every single thing that ailed people!” added Florimel.

“It can’t be hard to know what any one needs when your thoughts are almost inside her mind; you love her so much, and long so to make her happy,” said Mary.

“Glad you like my notion! The thing now is to find a Worthy Object.”

“A Worthy Object that won’t object unworthily?” suggested Jane. “We’ll find one, my Mary! If we have to burn down some one’s house and set the family down beside the road, with only one stocking apiece—and amputate

the other legs!—we'll find some one to whom we can give our proceeds!"

"If I drive the car maybe I could run over the head of a family," said Florimel hopefully. "I can't steer very well yet."

"You'd be more likely to wreck your car to save a chicken!" laughed Mary. "The head of the family would have to be taken off and rolled right under the car for you to hurt it, soft-hearted little Mel!"

"My heart might be all right, and my hand all wrong," retorted Florimel.

"We'll ask Mr. and Mrs. Moulton and Win to find us something to give money to."

That evening Win brought around the great car and Mrs. Garden and Mary persuaded Florimel to join them in the tonneau, to let Win carry on Jane's education in driving a little farther. Jane sat with Win in the front, and the middle seats were occupied by Anne and Abbie, Anne's tall and bony structure counterbalancing Abbie's unwieldiness.

"Win, we are to drive 'entirely northward,' Abbie said," Jane explained, her voice covered by the engine from the hearing of the others. "We go to the edge of Vineclad, 'most to the next town'; Joel Bell lives in the country."

"All right, Janie; catch hold of the wheel and change places with me. You're to drive and find this Bell. What a lot of bother it would save if he were the kind of bell that kept ringing, as long as Abbie doesn't know precisely where he lives," said Win, holding the wheel steady over Jane's head as he stood up to slip into the other seat.

The pleasures of the chase were added to the enjoyment of the lovely drive in that exquisite hour between sunset and summer starlight.

Joel Bell proved illusive—Mary said perhaps he was a diving bell. At last they found some one who could tell them where to go, and they made the last stage of the journey carefully, for it was a neighbourhood perfectly capable of throwing tire-wrecking substances into the road. Joel Bell proved to be a melancholy person. His melancholy was justified when it developed that his wife had died some months ago, leaving him with three small Bells to be taken care of and provided for. The trouble was that poor Joel could not provide for them, if he took care of them, for earning money and staying at home were not compatible.

"I know a real smart girl, young, but old enough to take care of children like mine—the

baby's most two—if I could afford to hire her, but I can't, so what 'm I to do?" he demanded. "There ought to be some place in Vineclad where you could dump little children while you worked, same's I hear tell of elsewhere."

"A Baby Dump, sometimes called a Day Nursery! There's our Object!" cried Jane, stretching her slender neck backward to make Mary hear.

"Are there enough people here who would use such a place, Mr. Bell?" asked Mary, leaning over the door of the car with her sympathetic eyes on Joel Bell's melancholy face.

"'Round here they is," he said, looking at Mary with the frankest admiration. "There's a mill right near here; lots of folks work in it, men and women; they'd get on better if they had some such dumpin' place to leave their babies. An' a kind of a dispensation would be good, run along with it."

"A dispensation? From school? The children wouldn't be old enough for that," said Win, feeling his way toward enlightenment.

"Land, no! I don't see what you mean," said Joel Bell, mystified in his turn. "A dispensation where they'd get medicine free, an' maybe a doctor's overhaulin'."

"Oh, of course! Why didn't we think of that?" cried Mary hastily, afraid Win would heedlessly correct Joel and tell him that he had meant to say dispensary.

"Well, well!" Mrs. Garden cried impatiently, having no clue to why this need of the neighbourhood should interest her three girls as it did. "All this is quite wide of the mark! We came to offer you a position in my employ, my good man. I am told that you know enough of gardening to be useful to us, and, if possible, I want you to learn to drive this car. Get the young girl you spoke of to look after your children, and you will find yourself much better off than you have been, I'll warrant."

"Dear me, if madrina only wouldn't call Abbie 'my good woman!' and this man 'my good man!' I'm sure they hate it," thought Mary, aghast at this imperative manner of dealing with the difficult native American temperament.

"Do I understand that you're a-askin' me to work for you, ma'am?" asked Joel Bell.

"You see, Mr. Bell," Win interposed, "it's this way: Mrs. Garden is nervous about driving with her daughters alone; I am busy all day, and she wants a trusty man to learn the car and

to look after our big old garden. Maybe you know it? Hollyhock House, on the opposite side of town, rather outside it? On Picea Street?"

Joel Bell's face glowed with unexpected enthusiasm. "I should say I did know the old Garden place!" he cried. "Are you Winchester Garden, that they call Win? Never once suspected who 'twas! I know a considerable of gardenin', but cars ain't in my line. Maybe they'd come to me, though. Would you make it wuth my while to accept your offer, ma'am? I'd have to hire a girl for my offspring."

"If you can learn to drive and take care of the garden, both, I'll give you—fourteen pounds, was it, Win? Seventy-five dollars a month, did you say, Win? If you can't drive, perhaps we'd keep you anyway, at about forty dollars or so," said Mrs. Garden carelessly.

Joel's eyes shot a gleam of triumphant joy, which his pride instantly recalled. "I'll think it over, ma'am," he said nonchalantly, "an' let you know in a day or two. To who do I feel indebted for recommendin'?"

"Don't know to whom you do feel indebted, Joel," laughed Win, thinking it about time Mr.

Bell came off his pedestal. "But it is Abbie Abbott, here, who told us of you."

"*Indeed!*" said Joel, bowing as if he were acknowledging an introduction. "An' t' best o' my knowledge an' belief I never met the lady before now."

"You didn't! But my cousin Lemuel Abbott, the plumber, told me 'bout you," snapped Abbie, unbearably annoyed by her own embarrassment at this extreme gallantry.

"Better close the deal now, Joel; we shall not care about coming again to see you," advised Win, seeing that Joel needed less than no time for consideration of the offer.

"Well, I might try it, s'long's you need a man," Joel said graciously. "I'll be taken on as a gardener, till you learn me to shofer real good. I'm poor, but I'm straight; I wouldn't take wages I hadn't earnt."

"Right-o!" Win approved him, as Mrs. Garden, entirely at sea as to how to deal with this unknown type of servant, murmured something about this being satisfactory.

"Move on, Janie!" said Win, watching Jane manipulate the starting button and the gas. "Turn on your lights before we start; you'll need them to drive."

Joel watched her also, with admiration that included reassurance. "Seems as if I could do what a little red-headed girl could," he said, in all sincerity, without intending to be impertinent.

When the car had brought them all home again, under Jane's handling, "without one bit of help from Win this time!" she triumphantly reminded her family, the girls huddled together in the hall and in animated whispers discussed the suggestion they had received.

"It seems perfectly ridiculous to establish a Day Nursery in Vineclad," said Mary, anxious to do so, but equally anxious not to make their charity absurd.

"But Joel knows!" Florimel said aloud, immediately clapping her hand over her lips. "He knows a great deal besides, but he must know that neighbourhood."

"Win told me coming home that Hammersley & Dallas had once had some law case to settle near there, real estate quarrel, and that there were hardly any Americans over there. There are poor Italians, and some Hungarians working in that mill. Fancy, in Vineclad! We don't know our own town across its width!" said Jane. "We'll get up an entertainment for a

Day Nursery and a—‘a Dispensation’ for the little youngsters over there. It’s all right, Mary; it must be needed if that man says so. But I’ve often noticed that almost any object is all right, enough excuse, I mean, if people want to have an entertainment.”

“I’m sure we don’t want it ourselves!” sighed Mary.

“No, indeed! No fussing for me! I’d rather stay outdoors; summer’s short enough!” Jane confirmed her.

“Well, I don’t know!” said Florimel. “We’ve been outdoors all our lives, in the garden, summers. I’d like to do some perfectly gloriumpant stunt, if madrina could train me to, something that went with a zip!”

“That’s the way it would go if you did it, even if it was sitting fishing in a pond where there wasn’t one fish to bite!” declared Mary, rumpling Florimel’s black hair and laughing as she shook her lightly and kissed her hard.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“WISE TO RESOLVE AND PATIENT TO PERFORM”

“Now, small madrina,” said Jane, coming into the library where her mother sat before the hearth upon which Mark was laying a fire in deference to the cool dampness of the evening; “you are to be told something, and implored something, and you must be very, very good and ready to say yes to a polite beggar.”

“I’d be surer to say yes to a rude beggar, because I’d be afraid of him,” Mrs. Garden said. “Please don’t ask me to go on a picnic, Jane; I loathe picnics.”

“Not a picnic in my possession!” declared Jane. “But that’s mind reading! How did you guess I had any sort of festivity in my mind?”

“Jane, if I dared permit myself an ancient bit of slang, I’d say I’d no idea you had festivities in your mind, that I thought Vineclad festivities were all in your eye! I’ve been here over two months and the gayest times I’ve seen were our own garden party—and that was

nice—and some depressing teas. I do wish I dared hope your festivity were festive!”

“Madrina, we’re going to get up——”

“Well, it’s encouraging to hear you’re the originator of the affair, Jane,” Jane’s mother interrupted her energetically. “You are my daughters; more likely to think of something I’d enjoy. Tell me!”

“We are going to get up something, we don’t know what; we’re counting on you to tell us, to raise a little money for the Day Nursery that Joel Bell said was needed over there. Don’t you think we ought to?” Jane tried to look noble. Her mother laughed and Mark applauded with the tongs.

“In all truth, my dear, I don’t think you could raise enough for the nursery, but no one could approve more heartily than I of the attempt,” Mrs. Garden said. “Haven’t you, really, thought of an entertainment? Because I have! I’ve been thinking of it a good deal lately. Shall I tell you? It’s original. Anything at this time of year ought to be held out of doors, don’t you think? Would it matter that we used our garden? I mean do we seem to emphasize the garden too much? It is so lovely, so big and suitable to almost any purpose.”

“You couldn’t have said anything we’d like to hear much better than that, *madrina*,” said Mary, slipping into the room behind her mother’s chair and laying her hands on the shoulders which persisted in remaining thinner than the Garden girls liked to see them. “We hoped you’d love our best friend and dearest possession.”

“Of course I love such a garden as that!” cried Mrs. Garden. “Here’s my idea of a nice, perfectly new kind of party: Invite your guests—since it’s to be for charity, sell tickets instead—to meet their friends, of all ages and conditions. Select certain people to be the actors and distribute among them just as many characters as you can; as you can costume and get well taken, that means. Each character would wear a number in a conspicuous place, and wander about the gardens, which would be hung with lanterns and made as pretty as possible in every way. Some of the actors would represent several characters; they would wander about for a certain length of time in one costume, then change and reappear in another. Some of your helpers would have more talent than the others and could enact more rôles. The—I wonder if one should say audience in such a case? The guests not acting would be provided with

small pads and pencils, the pads headed with the words: 'I Met'—followed by numbers down the side of each page, as many numbers as there were characters represented. The guests would write against each number the name of the character—his guess of the character—bearing that number. Prizes would be given for the three most accurate lists in order of merit—first, second, and third prizes, and a consolation prize, if you wished. The actors would be required to enact their parts as well as they could, and to answer questions—trying, of course, to give baffling answers—put by the guessers to elicit their identity. We should alter and add to this programme as we came to experiment with it, I suppose. Don't you think it might be made perfectly charming? All these prettily costumed creatures wandering around under the lantern-hung trees, singing, reciting, doing whatever the characters demanded done? And mightn't it be lots of fun?"

The girls, Florimel, too, and Win, now added to the group before the fire, had listened to Mrs. Garden's description of her idea for a summer evening's revel without interrupting her, but with glances at one another expressing their satisfaction.

“Madrina, it’s great!” cried Jane, first, as usual, to find her voice.

“It would be beautiful, really beautiful, if we could do it as it ought to be done,” said Mary, doubt and desire in her voice.

“Well, I want to be Lady Macbeth!” cried Florimel, which desire, accompanied in its expression by a jump from her low stool and a pirouette most unsuited to tragedy, raised a shout of laughter.

“We’d call the entertainment ‘the Garden of Dreams,’” Jane announced.

“Janie, what a happy label!” Mary said. “My one fear, madrina mia, is that we couldn’t carry out your lovely programme, but if you train us, I suppose we might.”

“Of course I’ll train you! And take any number of characters myself. Shall we make out a list of characters? Get pencils and paper, Florimel, please, and we could set down the names of the actors—your part of it, girls!” Mrs. Garden was all animation, youthfulness flowed into her and flashed from her. Her children exchanged satisfied glances; already their plot was a success. The advertised object of the entertainment was not their object; the Day Nursery was incidental. What mattered

was that their plaything mother, growing dearer to them and more of an anxiety each day, should be kept interested and happy.

“Now that our future voters have spoken,” said Win, “might a mere man say that he thinks this a suggestion worthy of a better cause? Also that a Day Nursery in the neighbourhood proposed for it would be a da-go nursery? Also to ask where you’d get costumes, and what you think your proceeds would amount to, if you hired so many costumes, decent enough to be seen at close range?”

“Oh, Win!” Mary’s distressed voice surprised Win, who lacked the clue to her eagerness not to have her mother’s suggestion wet-blanketed, “we can make most of the girls’ costumes, and it wouldn’t cost much to hire a few for the men.”

“Why, Winchester, I have a whole chestful of costumes among my boxes,” Mrs. Garden triumphed in her announcement.

“What may I be?” Mark asked meekly, having been listening and not talking.

“Mark Twain!” Mary almost shouted this happy discovery. “Mark Two, you know! You have thick hair; we’ll comb it out bushy, and powder it, and you can wear a white suit!

That would be fine, for one thing! Too easy to guess, but some must be easy."

"I thought little Jack Horner would fit me; I've pulled out a plum in Mr. Moulton—also a peach, in Mrs. Moulton, too," Mark said sincerely.

"Perhaps Jacky was really a good boy, and was right when he said it, and that's why he got the plum," said Jane slyly.

Mark smiled at her. "I thought I ought to be Richard Third," he said. "He was lame, wasn't he? I could don a hump. He's not an attractive gentleman."

"Was he lame? He limped on the straight and narrow path, Mark," commented Win. "But lame is too big a word for your tiny drop step, Mark!" protested Florimel.

"Drop step? That's a new one, Florimel! Quick step, sick step, drop step—goes like a door step!" laughed Mark, who sensibly refused to be sensitive about his slight lameness.

"Is the meeting adjourned, with a resolution to hold the Garden of Dreams festival? Because Abbie was making us grape juice sherbet when I came in. She said she thought we'd be about uncomfortable enough from our fire to want it later on! And we are pretty warm and

miserable for people who were chilly, aren't we?" Mary arose as she spoke and went toward the door to let Abbie know that the hour for sherbet had struck. She laid her hand, with a caressing touch that suggested a benediction, on her mother's head as she passed her.

"Happy, little Lynette-madrina?" she asked, without pausing for an answer.

Mark stirred in his chair and turned his eyes upon the fire to hide from the others the look that he was himself conscious had sprung into them as he had watched Mary's betrayal of her sweetness; to hide also the moisture that often rose to them when this happy Garden family reminded him that, though his days were now filled with friendly affection, he had no one whom he might claim his own.

The Vineclad girls, when they heard of the Garden of Dreams, were ready to give the Gardens, mother and daughters, the adulation which grateful children pay—or should pay—to fairy godmothers, who turn the pumpkins of this work-a-day world into chariots, and make the most secret longings of youthful hearts come true. Never before had it befallen them to impersonate the heroines of romance, clad in picturesque garments, trailed

blissfully through fairy scenes. It was not a simple task to apportion the characters. Not only must they be given to the persons best fitted physically to assume them, but a perfectly successful impersonation involved mental sympathy between the real and assumed individuals, else bearing and movements would be out of accord. When it came to fencing to ward off the guessers' questions, which must be answered, betrayals would be inevitable, unless each actor understood the character he, or she, portrayed sufficiently to reply correctly yet misleadingly. The Vineclad boys were dubious about the whole thing; they had a common misgiving among them that walking about in costume would "make them feel like fools." There were a few who took kindly to the idea, seeing it in its true light, as informal drama, but in the main the older men were impressed into service for the masculine characters, which remained in the minority. Mr. Moulton developed amazing enthusiasm for the dressing-up game, unexpected, and the more delightful in him. He volunteered to assume the rôles of blind Milton, if Mary would walk with him as Milton's devoted daughter, Mary; Sir Humphrey Gilbert, for whom Mr. Moulton, it seemed, had a

secret admiration; Merlin, out of Tennyson's Idyls, and King Cophetua, with Florimel as the Beggar Maid.

"It's perfectly scrumptious of you, Guardian!" said Jane. "We never dreamed we could get you into it—and four times! It must be all those plants you work over springing up in you and making you blossom out!"

"A botanist ought to enjoy transformations, an elderly man ought to be glad to be rejuvenated, and we are all secretly inclined to the drama, my dear," Mr. Moulton answered her. "This notion of Lynette's strikes my fancy; I leaped to the bait of one night's youthfulness; that's all."

"Nothing to apologize for, Mr. Moulton," said Mary. "You are to have four rôles, then, and Mark four—Galahad, Alexander Hamilton—we think Mark looks a little like him—Clive Newcome, Kim. And Win will be Mark Antony—I don't see how anybody can be sure which Roman he is, when togas were so fashionable!—Robin Hood, The Last of the Mohicans, L'Aiglon—in a gorgeous satin costume!—and Oliver Goldsmith. If only you three could be in as many places at once as you can take parts we'd seem to have an army of men! That short Dal-

las boy, Fred, is to be Little Tommy Tucker, crying for his supper, and Phil Ives will be Barnaby Rudge, with a stuffed crow they have, a pet crow he was before he was stuffed—as Barnaby’s raven, on his shoulder. It will really be good. We have George Washington, tall Mr. Bristead, and Agamemnon, king of men, will be Mr. Hall, because he’s so huge. Goodness only knows what he’ll look like if he wears a Grecian costume! And Mr. Low wants to be Falstaff—with pillows to fill him out—and he will act the part well. There are other men characters. Tiny Nanette Hall is to be Little Miss Netticoat, in a white petticoat! That will really be dear! A straight little candle costume, a red flame wired up on her head, and a fluffy white skirt, like a candle shade! The girls are ready to take as many parts as we can dress.”

“I’m to be Brünhilde,” cried Jane, “on account of my hair. And Joan of Arc, and the White Lady of Avenel, and the Red-haired Girl in ‘The Light that Failed,’ and Lady Clara Vere de Vere, and Snow White—as many more as they like! Madrina is going to teach me the ‘Willow Song,’ and I’m to be Ophelia, but that’s a secret! I’m crazy about it.”

“Most suitable to Ophelia; it promises well

for your acting the part, Jane," suggested Mr. Moulton. "And Mary?"

"I'm to be your Beggar Maid, Cophetua's," cried Florimel, not hearing his question. "And Katharine Seyton, in 'The Abbot,' and Madge Wildfire, and Cleopatra, and Lady Babbie, in 'The Little Minister,' and Topsy—black face! Burnt cork! Goodness, what fun! And a Spanish dancer; Carmen, we'll call her."

"I'm Mary Milton, with you," Mary then got a chance to say. "And Ruth Pinch, and Dinah Craik, in 'Adam Bede,' you know, and Florence Nightingale, and Madam Butterfly, and Pippa—the Pippa who passed. I like that one, an Italian peasant dress, and just go happily along singing softly: 'God's in his heaven and all's right in the world.' And madrina wants me to be Mother Hubbard, in a nice, little tucked-up gown, with Chum following me around after a bone. But I'm afraid the crowd would be more frightful to Chum than the bone would be attractive. You never could imagine the lovely things madrina will be and do! She's going to wear about seven of her costumes. We've got to find names for each part. People can't guess, it wouldn't be fair if she were just 'A Child'; it must be some particular child, and

so on. But we can arrange that. Madrina is so happy over it, Mr. Moulton! She isn't a bit lonely now."

"Own up, my Mary! You are not doing this for a charity in the first place, but for your mother's sake—or perhaps you think charity should begin at home?" Mr. Moulton accused Mary, a hand on her shoulder.

"Madrina must not dwell on her lost voice, dear Guardian," said Mary, with a deprecating look. "Do you think Mrs. Moulton could be persuaded to represent Cinderella's godmother? We could have a dear Cinderella group if she would."

"I think nothing short of chloroforming her and setting her up, unconscious, to fill a lay figure's rôle could get my wife into anything distantly resembling tableaux, or amateur theatricals!" laughed Mr. Moulton.

"I suppose I knew that," sighed Mary, then smiled, dismissing her regret. "We're terribly rushed rehearsing; madrina is training some one every minute. I've got to go now, Mr. Moulton. I need practice as Pippa."

It was perfectly true that the Garden girls were "terribly rushed rehearsing." The Garden of Dreams took on nightmare aspects at

times, it required so much anxious discussing, so much actual hard work, added to which the heat of August, sultry and heavy, made hammocks alluring and naps hard to ward off. But on the whole even the unexpectedly arduous preparations were enjoyable, Mrs. Garden was in her element, and the outlook was all for success. One important happy result had already been attained from the mere rehearsing of the Garden of Dreams. Jane had developed under her mother's training such instinctive talent for the dramatic singing required to accompany impersonations that Mary and Win were amazed, and Mrs. Garden was greatly excited. At first the excitement seemed to hold something of regret; it would have been hard to say whether Jane's mother was glad or sorry to find her second child inheriting her talent, intensified.

"Jane, why Jane! You are extraordinarily good at this!" she cried. "You act well, really *well*, you know! And your voice! Your voice is going to be better than mine ever was! Jane, Jane, what can you mean by it? You can sing and I cannot! Your life lies all before you, and mine is over and done with!" She dropped into a chair as she spoke, and burst into weeping, great

sobs tearing her slender form, her thin shoulders heaving.

Jane flew to her, with a distressed glance over toward Mary.

“Little girl-mother, don’t mind, please don’t mind!” Jane begged, on her knees before her mother, gathering her shaking little body into her firm young clasp. “I’ll never sing a note unless you want me to; truly I won’t! And don’t you see your life isn’t over and done with if I can do this? That’s nonsense, of course; I mean your life being over when you seem younger than we girls! What I meant was about the singing. If I could sing, if I have a voice, it came from you, and when I sang it would be you singing still, through me. It would be beautiful, I think, if it were so, because then you would go singing on and on, when you thought you’d never sing again! If I sang you could say: there’s my dear voice that I loved so and never expected to hear again! Jane’s taken it out to exercise it for me! And when you wanted to sing, you could say: Jane, use my voice for me; I want to sing ‘Good-bye, Sweet Day,’ or whatever you would sing that special minute. Couldn’t you feel that way about it? It would be so lovely!

But if you'd rather, I'd take a clam vow right away and keep it, never to sing any more than a clam does, humming in my bed—do clams sing in their clam beds, do you suppose?"

Mrs. Garden's moods were beginning to be less amazing to her girls; they changed with darting rapidity, swinging from despair to laughter at a word. Now she sat up and laughed, a little tremulously, but still she laughed, drying her eyes and hugging Jane with a funny childish little chuckle.

"Jane, you're a farce comedy! No wonder you act well—which is not the same as behaving well, miss! 'A clam vow' is an entirely new sort! And I certainly do not want you to take one. I see precisely what you mean by your voice being my proxy, my little glowing-haired poet, Jane, and it can be true; it *is* true; we'll make it true! What dear children you are, all three of you! Mary, sweetheart, don't look so troubled! It was bad, downright bad and wicked of me to cry like that. I'm happy now, truly. It was just a minute of wickedness! I felt as though I couldn't bear it to hear Jane singing at less than half my age, and to know I was silenced forever! It isn't that I'm not glad Jane can sing, but that I'm sorry that I can't!

But Jane found the word to the enigma; she has shown me how to be glad, and I *am* glad! I'll let you use my voice, Janie, just as long as you want to—or as long as you can! People can't always sing as long as they want to, my dear! And I'll try to remember it is mine, not yours. I'm going to train you just as well as I know how; you must not sing much for two years. Then you shall be taught by better masters than I. I'm delighted! My voice, that I loved best of all earthly things, is not gone, but is transferred. And here's another thing, children: if I had not come home when I could no longer use my voice I should never have known that it had been smuggled into the states—for I'm certain you didn't pay the duty on it, Jane!"

"Not a penny, *madrina*!" declared Jane, with a glad look at Mary. This was the first time that their mother had spoken of her return to Vineclad as "coming home."

"I think it was brought in, past the customs officers, in a baby's shirt, and that they never noticed it, for I've had it ever so long, and when I found it, it was under a little soft shirt you put on me without noticing it, either; I believe you thought it a little squeaky squawk."

From this hour there was a change in Mrs.

Garden; she seemed happier, and her eyes followed Jane with new interest, she threw herself into the preparations for the Garden of Dreams with new zest. Jane's brilliant beauty, her delicate grace, her luminous pallor, her radiant hair seemed to enthrall her mother, now that she had found them the casket of her lost voice. For Jane's pretty fancy took hold of her mother's imagination; it was plain that she was beginning to feel that her voice actually did live on in Jane, and to be comforted by the thought. Mary was still her mother's comfort, her sweet reliance, as she was every one's, but in Jane her mother seemed to find her own reincarnation.

Thus, with new pleasure and enthusiasm, the rehearsals for the entertainment in the Gardens' old garden went on toward its perfecting.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“OUR ACTS OUR ANGELS ARE, OR GOOD OR ILL”

Vineclad bought tickets to the Garden of Dreams without stint. It had never suspected its own need of a Day Nursery, not even in its poorer neighbourhood, but it more than suspected its need of being entertained, and it aroused to seize its opportunity.

“It will take more than Joel Bell to restore the garden after the entertainment,” said Florimel ruefully.

“Oh, no!” cried Mary. “We wouldn’t have it if we thought so! Vineclad will keep to the paths and the grass, and the grass will spring up in the first rain, if it does get trodden down slightly. Little madrina, go away and rest; you look tired and you mustn’t be tired to-night, not the stage manager, costumer, dramatic and singer teacher, and leading lady!”

“Why, I am all these things; isn’t it so, Mary?” cried Mrs. Garden, in childish glee.

“And little toy-mother besides! Come along,

little porcelain lady, and get rested," said Jane, putting her arm around her mother's willowy waist and drawing her along.

"Jane found the word, Florimel; Jane always does!" cried Mary. "Our mother is just that, a little porcelain lady! I've been trying to think ever since she came what it was that she made me want to say, and it's Austin Dobson's line: 'You're just a porcelain trifle, belle Marquise.'"

"Don't know it," said Florimel, too preoccupied to be interested in poetical labels and their suitability. "Can't you come and see, once more, if all my costumes are right, Mary?"

"I have a few last stitches to take on my Florence Nightingale dress; a red cross to sew on, and the cap isn't right. I'll do it in your room and look yours over at the same time, though we have made sure of yours over and over, Mellie," said patient Mary.

To do Florimel justice she usually aroused to see Mary's readiness to serve when her hands were more than full. She did so now. Throwing her arms around her in a hug that was more expressive than considerate, she cried:

"You dear old Mary-Job, you! Why don't you say: 'Get out with you, you selfish little black gypsy! I've got enough to do to attend

to myself. Besides, you've been attended to! And, *besideser*, nobody will look at a snip like you when Jane and I are around!' But no! You tell me you'll 'look me over again' while you sew your own things—at the eleventh hour! But you won't; I'll ask Anne. Only she wouldn't know! I'll get Jane—if I can. I'm always vowing I won't torment you, Molly darling, but you're so unselfish you spoil me!"

"What nonsense, Mel! As if I didn't just love to fuss over you! Come along," Mary insisted, and, in spite of her protests, Florimel was only too glad to go with her. The Garden of Dreams was to begin at half-past eight; now, in August, the dusk was deep enough at that hour to allow effectual lighting of the myriad lanterns which everywhere were to illumine the old garden.

The spectators—that was not the word for them, either! Those who had purchased tickets allowing them to take part in the game of the evening came, for the most part, early.

Mrs. Moulton proved to be far more useful in her own proper—exceedingly proper—person than she would have been could she have been persuaded to appear in costume in the Cinderella group. The players had but the cloudi-

est notion of what was expected of them. Mrs. Moulton, acting as hostess, or a reception committee of one, supplemented the boys who gave out pads and pencils. She explained that the players were expected to set down the names of the characters whom, later on, they would meet wandering in the garden, each name opposite the number on the pad corresponding to the number which would be conspicuously worn by the actor; that they had the privilege of asking questions from the actors, intended to draw forth clues to their impersonations, questions which the actors were obliged, by the rules of the game, to answer, but only if they were capable of being answered indirectly. For instance, if one met a girl with a crook one would not be permitted to say point blank: "Are you little Bo-peep?" compelling the bereft shepherdess to answer: "Yes."

As the darkness dropped down over the garden, warm, fragrant, heavy with August dew, it absorbed and gave back the delicious blended odours from the garden: cedar and juniper and box, white lilies, alyssum, mignonette, monthly roses and hardy tea roses, heliotrope, sweet peas, pungent marigolds, phlox, nasturtiums, and many more living jars of fragrance, uncovered

to the sky as perpetual incense, and blended with the tonic scents from the herb garden, sage, savory, marjoram, thyme, and all the rest.

While the lantern-lighting was in progress the old garden filled with arrivals; no one was late, every one was curious to see what awaited them. There was a small but excellent little stringed orchestra, imported to Vineclad upon Mrs. Garden's insistence; she would not listen to suggestions of less competent musicians to supply the music. The pulsating harp strings, the poignant sweetness of the violins and viols, the accents of the mandolins emphasizing the flowing melody with their metallic tinkle, filled the garden with music as suited to the fragrance-laden dusk, the lantern lights twinkling everywhere, as the birdsongs in the morning would be suited to the young light of dawn.

As the guests strolled through the beauty, admiring it, yet speculating on what was to follow, there began to wander through the paths other figures, each in costume, fantastic, pretty, or ugly, but always suggestive, and each of these figures wore on his breast or upon hers a number, or, sometimes, this number was worn upon the arm, when the design of the costume did not permit it upon the breast.

The first of these impersonations were not particularly hard to guess. Jane, as Joan of Arc, with shield and sword and a rapt look on her intent face, for instance, was obviously the Maid of Orleans, and so beautiful that it was clear why her soldiers would follow where she led.

“Little Miss Netticoat” also was easy to guess, though one of the prettiest figures of the evening. But there were many baffling impersonations; some hard to guess because they were so definite, plainly representing a particular and unmistakable character which eluded memory; others equally hard to guess because they were so indefinite. A continental uniform, for instance, might cover the representative of Washington, or of any of his generals, and a lady in a formal court dress of a hundred and twenty-five years ago might be almost any one in France, England, or the newly evolved Western republic.

The game grew exciting on both sides, actors’ and guessers’. Questions flew through the air, as hard to dodge as shrapnel. The hard-pressed actors were confronted with posers, relentlessly assailing them, backed up by a pencil, ready poised over a pad, to set down the name which a careless, too hasty answer might betray.

“It isn’t fair!” cried Florimel, driven into a

corner in her Carmen costume by rapid-fire questioning of six people at once, drawn up before her. "What a lot of you to think up questions and only one of me to answer them! It's worse than setting limed twigs for crabs!"

But Florimel was hard to entrap; her nimble wit was at its best, excited as she was by the marvellously good time she was having. Brilliant Florimel's dark hair and eyes, and white and crimson cheeks, made her such a glowing picture in her pretty costumes that she could not help knowing what a success she made and having a good time in proportion to it.

Audrey Dallas proved helpless under fire of cross-examination, but Win's legal training, or quick wit, or both, stood him in good stead in answering correctly, but not relevantly. He therefore made Audrey's defencelessness a pretext for hovering near her, slyly to hint misleading answers to her. Even though Audrey was supposed to be looking toward college with an eye of single purpose, the Garden girls were sure she was not sorry that her inability to parry questions kept Win at her side. Win was quite well worth looking at in his various rôles, and laughter followed at his heels wherever he and Audrey went.

Sweet Mary was lovely as Milton's daughter, guiding the poet's steps. Mr. Moulton made a good foil to her fresh loveliness in his black scholar's gown, though Mary told him that he "looked more like William Dean Howells than John Milton."

Later in the evening Mary, as Ruth Pinch, charmed and puzzled every one by bustling through the paths, in evidence of being busy, dressed in an old-fashioned flowered muslin, with short sleeves and round neck, and carrying in her hand a yellow mixing bowl in which she stirred hard with a kitchen spoon, to represent Ruth Pinch's famous "beefsteak pudding."

Yet of them all, players of the game and actors in it, none was happier, prettier, more charming, none as successful in acting as Mrs. Garden. Costume succeeded costume, as rôle succeeded rôle for her assuming, a wide range of characters, each as perfectly sustained as the other. As Ariel she flitted along the paths so lightly that she conveyed the sense of flight. As the White Rabbit, whom Alice knew, she hopped along with sidewise, timid glances, for all the world like a magnified bunny. As Blue-eyed Mary, of the old song, she wistfully vended flowers, slow of step and drooping with fatigue



“THOSE WHO KNEW HER BEST WERE AMAZED AND A LITTLE STARTLED”

and hunger. As the Marchioness she flaunted herself pertly in rags and with a smutty face, carrying her cribbage board, ready for a game with Dick Swiveller. And as Little Miss Muffet she was incredibly childlike and lovely in a Kate Greenaway costume, carrying her bowl and spoon on her way to look for a tuffet to sit on to eat "her curds and whey," and murmuring a little song under her breath, like a rhythmic chant of a happy child.

"She's perfectly wonderful!" Vineclad agreed. Even though there were Vineclad matrons who felt Mrs. Garden's talent was unsuited to the mother of three big girls, however young a mother she might be, still they all agreed that she "was wonderful."

The most beautiful picture of the evening, the impersonation longest remembered in Vineclad, was Jane as Ophelia, however. Jane threw herself into her part with such self-forgetfulness, such enthusiasm, talent so extraordinary in so young a girl, that those who knew her best were amazed and a little startled. All in white, with her masses of red-gold hair falling around her, crowned by a wreath of old-time garden flowers, intertwined with long sprays of wild flowers, which straggled downward and

mingled with her marvellous hair; her pale face uplifted, her eyes set with an unseeing look in their dilation; her hands holding up her apron filled with flowers, which she lifted and dropped, and lifted again, sometimes kissing them, sometimes throwing them from her; singing the Willow Song from Othello, and singing it with a voice as pure and true as it was high and sweet, singing it with an abandonment of grief that proved Jane's talent, for she had not yet reached the sixteenth of her happy years, and understood heartbreak only through her intuitions, Jane glided on through the garden paths toward the fountain. No one stopped her to ask a question; she could be none other than Ophelia, mad. Conversation died out, the murmur of voices everywhere was silent, as the guests fell into groups to watch this enthralling young loveliness pass, and to listen to the pathos of her despairing song.

"She's more than I ever would have dared to dream of being!" cried Mrs. Garden in an ecstasy. "She can soar higher than I could ever have climbed; she is an artist! Think of her now, but fifteen! Oh, I'm so glad, *glad*, that one of my girls is Jane!"

"And you can be just as glad that only one is

Jane," retorted Mrs. Moulton dryly. "She's a dear girl, very fine and dear; I don't mean that she's not, but I do mean that the old-fashioned talents, like Mary's, make everybody happier than Jane's cleverness can—not excepting, indeed, first of all!—their possessor."

"Jane is devoted, generous, unselfish, as well as clever," said Mrs. Garden. "Of course I know you think so. I appreciate Mary, or appreciate her as well as I am able. I realize that no one can sound Mary's depths in as short a time as I've known her. But you must let me rejoice in having one artist daughter, Mrs. Moulton, please! It is such a great thing to be a true artist!"

"I doubt that it makes a woman happier. I want Jane to find her happiness in simple things—for her own sake. Don't foster an ambition for a career in her, Lynette," Mrs. Moulton urged.

Mrs. Garden laughed. "I fancy it wouldn't alter anything, dear Mrs. Moulton," she said. "Jane will find her own level. Do look at her, kneeling by the fountain! Would you not be sure it was a deep, dark pool, and that she was going to her mad death? Ophelia ends there; they must all guess it. But what a child!"

“They” did “all guess it.” There was the silence that is the truest applause for an instant, then the garden rang with shouts of: “Ophelia! Ophelia!” to the accompaniment of clapping hands.

Mary had urged that Joel Bell be bidden to bring his children to see the festival which he had, indirectly, suggested. The three little Bells were small, in varying degrees of smallness, down to the baby, who, Joel had said: “Was ’most two.” They ranged from her up past another girl of four, to the boy, who was six. Tucked away in a safe vantage corner for seeing, unseen, the three small Bells had bewilderedly watched many things and people which they could by no means understand, had enjoyed the music, but had finally settled down to adoration of the lanterns swaying in the breeze, as the crown and glory, the wonder and beauty, beyond all the other beautiful wonders which enveloped their awe-struck minds. The baby was too young for her awe to strike lastingly deep. Several times she escaped her sister’s and brother’s competent vigilance and sallied forth from their post, only to be caught and brought back, her protests muffled, not soothed, by firm little hands clapped over her wide-open mouth.

Just at the end of the entertainment, when those appointed to the task were getting ready to collect lists from the guessers, count up correct entries after the numbers, and award the prizes for the three best lists, Nina Bell, the baby, still wide awake when the two older little Bells were getting muffled by sleepiness, saw her chance and escaped once more, this time successfully. She toddled along, her covetous eyes on the swinging lanterns quite beyond the reach of her hands, but not of her ambition.

“Everything comes to him who waits” is more or less true. Small Nina had been waiting all the evening to see one of those luminous bright things close by. As she went wistfully along the path now, a cord from which a line of the lanterns was suspended dropped from the farther branch to which it had been attached and fell at her feet.

Here they were, not one but eight glowing, queer flowers thrown by kind fairies to her fingers! With a crow of joy Nina stooped clumsily—for stooping still involved for her a drop on to her hands rather than a bending of her body—and began to examine her prize. They were as satisfactory, seen at close range, as they had been at a distance. Suddenly, however, as she

poked and prodded them and lifted one, they altered. They were no longer flowers, with a single heart of flame in each; they were blazing from one to the other, and Nina held the cord. Instantly her own short white frock blazed with them. She gave a frightened scream. Then some one caught her, held her close, threw her down, beat out the flames with bare hands and rolled the little body in the grass, lying close over it. And this was Mary Garden.

By a coincidence Mary's final rôle had been Florence Nightingale; she wore on her arm the Red Cross of the hospital as she flew to the child's rescue, no one else at the instant near enough to render aid. With sure presence of mind and recklessness of her own danger, Mary beat out the flames enveloping the little creature, and saved her! But her own dress was a thin white cotton material, she wore a thin white apron, and her deep cuffs and collar were thinner than the regulation cuffs and collar of the nurse. In saving the child Mary's costume caught fire. Though she threw herself upon the ground it was not smothered. Win ran to her, his face distorted with agony, in his hand a coat from some one's continental uniform. Mark rushed after him, not keeping up, for the halting foot

impeded him and he hated it as he had never before hated his impediment. He had snatched up a rug which Mrs. Moulton had been standing on all the evening; with it he made his best speed toward Mary. All the other men ran toward her when the alarm spread, but Win and Mark reached her first, and they wrapped her in the coat and the rug, tearing from her the flaming garments beneath them which threatened her.

The cries of little Nina had turned attention in that direction; to this alone Mary owed her chance to live. Only her outer clothing, her dress and apron, caught at first; help reached her before her inner garments had led the fire to her tender flesh. Yet, fight as they best could, with many hands hastening to help Win and Mark, the blazing materials could not be extinguished till Mary was badly burned. She lay in merciful unconsciousness upon the grass, the dark rug and blue and yellow coat enveloping her, her sweet face unmarred, as her head in a hollow of the grass let it turn up, white and drawn, to the star-strewn sky.

“What an end to our evening!” groaned Mr. Moulton, raising Mrs. Garden, who had fallen, half fainting, beside Mary upon the grass.

“Now I shall go mad; not act it!” Jane said

fiercely, and Win turned to put his arm around her. Jane violently threw him from her. "Don't any one dare to try to comfort me. Mary! Mary!" she screamed.

The love between these two sisters was especially close and strong. Mary heard Jane's cry and her eyelids fluttered.

"It's all right, Janie," she murmured. "Hurts—a—little. Don't—worry."

"Take her up, boys, as carefully as you can, and carry her into the house. There's no time to lose getting a doctor. Any one sent for one?" said Mr. Moulton.

"Mr. Dallas went, in his car, tearing!" said Anne Kennington, who had come from the house, and now knelt, kissing Mary's shoes, where she thought her touch could not hurt her. "My lamb, my lamb! My Mary sweet!" she sobbed.

They raised Mary, and the lifting brought her back to full consciousness and to agony. But though it wrung their hearts to give her pain, no one could save her from suffering. If only they could save her life!

The little procession passed Florimel in a faint at the corner of the path. Mrs. Moulton lingered to attend to her. Mrs. Garden, hardly

able to walk, was helped homeward by Mr. Moulton. Jane walked, erect and ghastly, with great dilated eyes, a white, set face, and her masses of hair gleaming under Ophelia's mad wreath. Win and Mark, with two other young men to help them in case their arms weakened, carried Mary slowly, as carefully as they could, but she moaned at every step.

Thus in pain, and with tragedy threatening, ended the beautiful evening of the Garden of Dreams.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“FRAGRANT THE FERTILE EARTH AFTER SOFT
SHOWERS”

Mary's injuries were serious. “Not necessarily dangerous, but decidedly serious,” Doctor Hall explained to the tortured Gardens.

“May be dangerous?” he echoed Jane's question. “Surely, Jane. It all depends upon how Mary progresses. It is perfectly possible for her to develop dangerous symptoms. It is for us to do our best to prevent it. Mary is so unselfishly loving toward you all that I believe she will not give you pain in this! It wouldn't be like her! In any case, it is something to rejoice over that the flames did not lick her sweet old-time face. Mary always has looked to me like an old daguerreotype.”

Jane turned away with impatience hard to restrain. Doctor Hall had been their physician as long as the Garden girls could remember, longer, but Jane did not want to hear him speak of Mary's face. She did not want him to speak

of anything except Mary's condition. There was nothing left in the world to speak of nor to think of but that; all else was maddeningly unreal and intrusive. Mary lay wrapped in bandages, motionless, and, except for a few words feebly spoken occasionally, silent, patient. They did not know whether she slept most of the time, or lay enduring, weak, yet strong in submissive patience. The doctor said that there could not be a better patient. Mary gave herself up to being taken care of with the complete resignation that best coöperates with science and nursing.

Mr. Moulton had insisted upon a nurse for Mary, though Jane and Anne begged to be allowed to take care of her, promising entire obedience to Doctor Hall. But Mr. Moulton knew that it would be too hard upon those who loved her to dress Mary's wounds. The nurse, kind, interested, faithful, was installed; Jane, Anne, Mrs. Garden were spared seeing how dreadfully hurt their beloved girl was.

For that Mary was a beloved girl to all three her danger proved. Anne's devotion needed no proof; Jane's adoring love for her sister had begun when she, the little baby, watched the big baby—for they were babies together—and

wriggled to her as soon as she could creep. Florimel paid Mary the worship of a little sister for an older one, a tempestuous nature for a calm one, a generously ardent heart for one who deserved its best love. But now that Mary lay like the pitiful mummy of herself, now that the house was sadly deprived of her pervading unselfish presence, Mrs. Garden showed how closely this eldest daughter had grown into her love.

Jane prowled all day long, and the greater part of the night, up and down the hall, just beyond Mary's door, or lay prostrate on the floor in the next room, her ear against the wall to catch a sound. Florimel, always restless, sat for hours on the top step of the stairs, clasping her knees with her hands, also listening, listening, all day long listening. Anne often joined Florimel here; Abbie came at intervals to ask: "Anything?" Then to go solemnly away, disappointed by the inevitable "No." Win frankly gave up all attempt to work or to study during these days. He marched up and down the garden, often with Mark, whom Mr. Moulton released from duty. Indeed the older man was utterly unable to go on with his great book.

"What difference can it make about the flora

of New York State, if our sweetest blossom is stricken?" he demanded, drawing fiercely on his extinguished pipe. Mrs. Moulton sat throughout these anxious days holding her hands, restraining nervousness by a great effort, wholly unable to accomplish any task.

All this was to be expected, for Mary was dearest of all earthly things to each of these, even to Mark, though no one but himself knew this.

But Mrs. Garden became Mary's mother in full as she waited, watching, praying, fearing, to know whether she might keep her. No longer was she the Garden girls' "little toy-mother," as they had caressingly called her. She could not change her nature and become, suddenly, strong in body and dependence. All her life she must be the petted, reliant creature which habit had made her, but she proved that she could love her child and suffer keenly in the dread of losing such a daughter as Mary was. She it was who sat beside Mary's bed, ceaselessly watching her dear face for a contortion of pain, or for a clue to a wish, or for the smile with which Mary tried to cheer her troubled family.

"I'll be all right, little mother," she said feebly one day. "Why don't you go to drive?"

You are always here. Did that baby—is the Bell baby—better?”

Mrs. Garden knew what the word was which Mary could not bring herself to say. “The Bell baby was not badly burned, Mary. You saved her. She has suffered merely surface burns. She is in bandages, but not hurt as you are! Oh, Mary darling, and you are so much more valuable!” Mrs. Garden could not repress the cry. Mary gave her the ghost of her own smile.

“You mean you all love me best! You can’t tell about value. The Bell baby may do fine things before she is eighteen. I’m glad she is living,” Mary managed to say.

“You saved her life. I never expect to save a life in all my own life! A whole chime of Bell babies couldn’t ring the peal you do, Molly darling!” said Jane, who had come into the room.

Mary smiled at her, a better smile than she had heretofore achieved.

“Prejudice!” she whispered.

Slight as this encouragement was, Jane went away cheered. Surely taking interest in the Bell baby and discussing comparative value of lives must mean that Mary was better! Yet after this the fever which the doctor had feared

set in and Mary grew worse. At times she knew no one, but begged unbearably to be taken home to her "dear old garden," or implored for Jane, Florimel, or Anne, as the case might be. She never recalled her mother in her delirium, and, though Mrs. Moulton, moved to pity for the girlish mother for whom she had secretly felt a little contempt, carefully explained that Mary's mind turned back to her not-distant childhood, in which her mother had no part, that it was not the Mary of that summer forgetting her, Mrs. Garden was not consoled. Finding herself excluded from Mary now by her voluntary absence from her as she grew up, showed Mrs. Garden, as nothing else could have shown her, that the loss of her little girls' childhood was a heavy price to pay for the honour the world had heaped upon her.

"Rain, rain, rain!" Mary moaned. And again: "Rain, rain, rain!" repeated over and over, thrice each time, sometimes for a weary hour. Occasionally the lament was varied by the cry that Mary's garden "was burning up."

Jane knelt and said clearly, close to her ear, hoping that she might understand: "Mel and I take care of it, Mary dearest. It is watered and all right."

But Mary's head moved, distressed, and she repeated her trilogy: "Rain, rain, rain!"

There had been a drought of some weeks, the garden was suffering under it, although Joel Bell attached the hose to the garden reservoir and watered it. Joel was in utter anguish of mind over the disaster through which his child had so nearly died and Mary, perhaps, was to die for her.

"'Tain't in nature not to be glad Nina May Bell is saved, but, my soul an' body, you've no sort of an idee how I feel about your girl bein' so bad hurt for her," he repeated.

Doctor Hall said that it might be that a rain-fall would benefit Mary. In her delirium she plainly mingled the suffering of her burns with the remembrance of the drought that parched her beloved blossoms. She was so sensitive, he added, to atmospheric conditions that she might be harmed by the dryness in the air.

After this Jane and Florimel watched the sky for a cloud as the shipwrecked sailor in the desert island of fiction scans it for a sail. On the third day after Doctor Hall had said that rain might help Mary toward recovery, they saw the fleecy heads of clouds in the west, white at their base, golden in the summer sunshine on their tops,

the clouds which look as if one could plunge into them and fill the hands with their masses, the clouds which presage thunder. Later in the day the sky darkened into a metallic, cloudless sheet, blackened in the west to murky thickness, with a hint of yellow.

“It’s coming, madrina! Do you really think it will matter to Mary?” Jane implored.

“Oh, Jane dear, how can one tell? And I’m dreadfully afraid of lightning!” Mrs. Garden cried. These days of awful anxiety had told on her; the little woman looked wan and thin. It was the first time in her life that she had ever been called upon to live intensely and to face a real grief.

The storm broke with swift fury and raged till it had had its will of Vineclad. Then the electrical forces marched on, leaving behind them the steady, refreshing, permeating rain that the garden begged for, and for which its lover, Mary Garden, deliriously prayed.

As if Doctor Hall had been right, Mary sank into silence after the rain set in and, for the first time in several days, lay still. The beneficent rain fell quietly all the rest of the day and all night. The garden revived under it, its betterment visible from the windows, and Mary

slept, with its gentle lullaby playing on the piazza roof and window panes. The Gardens dared not be glad, yet relief sounded in each voice in the household. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton and Mark, coming over through the blessed wetness, plucked up heart a little. Mr. Moulton alluded to his book for the first time since Mary was burned. If Mary were to recover, then books and science would be once more possible, worth while.

In the morning Mary opened her eyes and smiled into her mother's, the ones in range with hers when she wakened. She touched her bandages and drew her brows trying to recall their meaning.

"Oh, now I know!" she said. "I remember. But I think I am better; I feel quite a different girl. Do you think I might have a nice little egg, madrina?"

"Oh, Mary, Molly darling! oh, my sweet, sweet girl! You may have all the eggs in the world, and all the chickens!" cried Mrs. Garden, falling on her knees in a frenzy of grateful joy.

Mary closed her eyes again with a tiny smile. "Too many—at once," she murmured. Anne would not let any one but herself prepare the

tray with Mary's breakfast that morning. Jane and Florimel almost quarrelled with her for driving them off, but Anne was relentless.

"She's been my child all her seventeen, going on eighteen, years, and I fed her and cared for her through every sickness she had. Now she's asked for food I shall get her first breakfast ready, and that's the end of it. You keep in mind how bad you wanted to do it, when you couldn't, and wait on her hand and foot when you can, later on, when she's getting about and tries to do for you two more than she should," Anne delivered her ultimatum as she bustled about, getting out the little squat wedgewood teapot, the cream jug and sugar bowl that Mary had loved best as a child, and had called "Mr. and Mrs. Dumpie Short," affectionately.

It did not need Doctor Hall's beaming face to tell the Garden household that Mary was better and was to stay with them. Nevertheless that look on his face was a joy to see, after the anxiety that had been knitting it.

"The best of the Garden girls is going to live on, Jane and Florimel," he said.

"With the worst of them!" cried Florimel, in a burst of happy tears. "Jane and I don't

care how high you put Mary above us. We know all about *her*!”

“Oh, well, I’ve seen worse little girls than you two, though Mary is about the sweetest maiden anywhere. That old word suits her, too. I’m happier than you can believe to tell you she’s safe. And her pretty face not touched, nor her fine hands scarred, beyond one mark that will last, on the right one. Her arms may be scarred. I think she may have to wear lace over them—when she goes to balls, I mean! But I had no hope, at first, of coming so near saving her from disfigurement.”

“Lace sleeves don’t matter; Mary won’t get to many sleeveless parties in Vineclad,” said Florimel. “To think we’re talking about parties! For Mary! Even if they had to be overall parties, it wouldn’t matter!”

“Right-o, kiddo!” cried Win, with a choke. “Suppose—say, Doctor, how’ll we be glad enough?”

“No need of telling any of you the best way to be glad,” said Doctor Hall, laying his hand on Win’s shoulder with a touch that expressed volumes.

Jane and Florimel, returning to Mary’s room, found their mother down on the rug before the

hearth with her scrapbooks and photograph cases, rapidly emptying them. The fire was laid on the hearth, ready for lighting, and Jane hastened over to her mother to ask what she was doing. Mrs. Garden looked up at Jane, and then at Florimel, with an expression on her face so new and different that both the girls were struck by it.

"I'm going to burn it all," she said, indicating her trophies with a comprehensive gesture.

"Madrina! What for? Indeed you're not!" exclaimed Jane.

"This is what took me from you when you were babies; this is what kept me from you all your lovely childhood, which can never be recalled; this is what made me happy while you thought me dead. I hate it all, suddenly! If Mary had died"—she dropped her voice, glancing toward the bed, but speaking fiercely in spite of the muffled tone—"if Mary had died, and I remembered how short a time I had known her, lovely, sweet, dear Mary, for the sake of this!" Mrs. Garden wrung her hands, unable to express her horror of what had been her pride. "There's nothing in it all, children; there's nothing in anything on earth that draws one away from right and beautiful motherhood.

Never forget that. I've been exactly what you called me: a toy-mother! I'm going to burn every foolish one of them!"

"No, madrina, please!" said Jane, dropping down beside her mother. "You didn't know when you went away from us; you were so young. You had no idea that motherhood was more beautiful, made sweeter music, than your singing. Don't be sorry; it all had to be. Do you suppose it matters how people learn things, provided they are not wicked? I imagine it's just like school: different courses, you know. I'm a lot like you, and I can sing and act, you say. Perhaps I'd never have known that glory isn't the best thing in the world if you hadn't left us, and come home to tell us. Though I couldn't have gone far from Mary! You mustn't burn these things, little madrina! We want them; they're *our* pride now, you see! It's like bringing in the sheaves; these are the sheaves you've brought into the garden, and to your Garden girls. They're ours now, madrina, because you are ours."

Mrs. Garden stared at Jane, amazed, then dropped her head on her shoulder with a long breath of relinquishment.

"You are uncanny, Jane, positively," she

said, still speaking low, not to disturb Mary. "You can't possibly know the things you seem to know, at your age! Every word you have said, Jane, is true and wise! How could you see all that? Mary is my sweet dependence, but you can be my teacher, thoughtful little Ruddy-locks! It's your intuition, the intuition of an artist, Janie, that shows you truth. After all, it is a great thing to be an artist, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" Jane breathed fervently. "But of course I've got to be Jane Garden, in the best way I can be, before I've a right to think of any other label. I feel ages older since Mary was hurt."

"So do I, Jane, ages!" her mother agreed with her, as if they were girls together. "I never had much experience with life; I've been playing on its surface."

"You can't have, can you, unless you're awfully fond of some one—like all of us now, here together?" asked Jane, suddenly embarrassed.

"More wisdom!" her mother exclaimed. "One lives in experience and feeling, not in events." She had spoken louder than she meant to, and Mary opened her eyes, and put out her hand. "Janie and Mel, I'm going to stay right here,

and I can't help being glad not to have even heaven without my chumsters," she said.

Florimel choked. When she was quite small, Mary had contracted the two words, "chums" and "sisters" into "chumsters," to express the peculiar closeness of the tie between the Garden girls. Florimel had always loved it. It was so sweet to hear it now, and to know that their intimate love was not to be cruelly sundered, that she ran out of the room to be tearfully glad, alone, on the stairs. Jane jumped up, and ran over to Mary.

"I couldn't have heaven without you, Molly darling," she said, putting her glowing head down beside Mary's brown one on the pillow. "It wouldn't be that, you know, if I saw you poking about the old garden beds down here without me. When are you coming out into the garden again, old Niceness?"

"Soon, I think," said Mary. "I don't intend to be long getting back my strength."

Mary was as good as her word. Now that her painful wounds had begun to heal, her sound young flesh went on rapidly with its task of restoration. In two days less than two weeks Mary was dressed in a beautiful new gown, all white and blue and soft-falling drapery, which

her mother had sent for, that she might come forth in it as an outer symbol of her recovery.

Mr. and Mrs. Moulton, with Mark, were there in the garden to receive Mary, each with a little welcoming gift for the girl who was the heart of the Garden place, house, garden, and household. Mark's gift was fringed gentians for which he had scoured the hills beyond Vine-clad, rising before the sun to gather the rare and beautiful blossoms. Mark murmured as he handed them to Mary, "They were as blue as her eyes, and very like her."

The rain that had associated itself with Mary's recovery in the minds of those who loved her had been followed by successive downfalls. The drought once broken, the earth received refreshment constantly. The garden was beautiful with the more gorgeous bloom of September. Salvia blazed above dark-red cannas; the hedge of hollyhocks at the end of the longest garden vista shone like the mint; cosmos delicately triumphed in its last act of the summer pageant. Through it all came the persistent fragrance of alyssum and mignonette, faithful to the end, not to be dismayed that, after their long summer sweetness, tall and showy flowers overtopped them.

“How lovely it all is after the rain! And after the fire!” said Mary, with a little laugh that caught in her throat. “I’m so glad to come back to you, dear old garden!”

“It is just as glad to get you back, daughter,” said Mr. Moulton, springing to forestall Win and Mark, and to help Mary into the lounging chair prepared for her. “The garden called us all together to tell you so, though it seems to me to need no spokesman.”

“It never needed one, though it adds to it! But how it speaks! I think it is fairly shouting, in reds and yellows and whites and purples: ‘The old Garden garden is glad to see you, Mary. It can’t quite spare one of its girls!’” said Mary, settling down with a sigh of utter content into her great chair and into the great love all things, animate and inanimate, around her bore her.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

“IMPLORES THE PASSING TRIBUTE OF A SIGH”

“When Mary began recapturing her kingdom she seemed to take it by assault. You can see her jumping back to health since she got out into the garden again, Lynette,” said Win, watching the three Garden girls from the dining-room window.

“She’s perfectly sound in health, so are Jane and Florimel; Jane is the least strong of the three. I’m so happy to see Mary’s colour coming back, to know she is safe, that I wonder at myself, Win!” said Mrs. Garden.

Win thought that she looked preoccupied.

“Seems small wonder to me, Lynette,” he said. “I’d expect any one to be happy about that, let alone Mary’s mother.”

“Oh, of course, if one reasons it out! But I’ve been so utterly outside domestic affairs always! I must go to write a note, Win, if you don’t mind. Lord Kelmscourt is sailing next week; he wants to come here before he goes.”

Mrs. Garden gathered up her mail from the table and went toward the door.

"Glad to see him, for my part," said Win sincerely. "Is he to stay here, in this house?"

"They were nice to me at Kelmscourt when I visited there." Mrs. Garden's reply conveyed an excuse. "Lord Wilfrid won't stay on long; hardly a second night. Anne thought we should be able to manage it quite easily; so did the girls, though I think they looked dismayed."

Win heard her soft laugh as she went out of the door. The Garden girls were dismayed; they were discussing the expected guest that moment in the garden; Win had noticed from the window that they looked solemn.

"He is coming to ask her to be Lady Kelmscourt," said Jane decidedly. "He would not come for anything else. In novels they 'run down to the country' before they sail for India, or Africa, or some land where they are going to get a chance to earn glory in the army, or else to kill some animals who are attending to their own jungle affairs, not meddling with any one in such distant lands. Then they ask the heroine to marry them, so they'll have courage to interfere with those none-of-their-business jungle folk, and she always does! I know!"

Mary laughed, though she looked troubled. "You say 'they' do all this, and the heroine marries 'them.' How many of them does the heroine marry, Janie?" she asked.

"One at a time, and one is quite enough," insisted Jane, undaunted.

"If *madrina* marries Lord Kelmscourt, I don't see how I can bear it," Florimel declared. "If, when we thought she was dead, we had heard she was alive and was Lady Kelmscourt, we should have been just as glad and just as excited as we could have been. Of course it would be pretty good fun to say, carelessly, to the other girls: 'My mother, Lady Kelmscourt, did' something or other. But it's not the same when you've had her and loved her. There's no use in my trying to think I'll enjoy visiting Lady Kelmscourt's English castle; I may, but what's that? And I think just as Jane does that *madrina* will be a—countess, is it? What kind of a lord is Lord Kelmscourt? *Madrina* knows we can't have garden parties in the winter, can't even sit in the garden; she knows there won't be anything, then, but the house. We like it, but Lord Kelmscourt has a palace, or a castle, or tower, or something. The moment she spoke of Lord Wilfrid's coming,

I said to myself: 'Farewell, cute little madrina!'"

Mary sang significantly: "'I have so loved thee, but could not, could not hold thee!' I don't see why you should bid her good-bye without waiting to find out whether she is going or not, Mel. She is altogether changed about Hollyhock House—and the Garden girls, for that matter! Perhaps she'll stay with them. I'm anxious, but when one is anxious, there's still hope; one isn't sure of the worst. I'm sure, whatever happens, we shall not lose her, so we've got to be reconciled to keeping her as she likes best to be kept. We can't be without her, really, though we may have to do without her—do you see that? It sounds like a riddle."

Mrs. Garden came down the steps, humming under her breath, looking so girlish and happy that her children's faces grew proportionately long.

"I was just writing Lord Wilfrid when he called me on the telephone," she said. "He is coming, to-night. Do you think his room is as it should be, Mary? Anne says it is, and I hesitate about going to see; she might resent it."

"Oh, madrina, if Anne says a room is right,

there's no need of any one else giving it a thought!" laughed Mary. "I'll look at it, and put flowers in it by and by. I don't know how rooms should be prepared for lords, even though they were once chauffeurs! In novels their rooms, all English rooms, seem to lay no stress on any furniture but a bath—valets bring in baths until one's back aches. As that room has its bath and dressing-room, I shouldn't know what other furniture to put into it."

"If the room is right for Mr. Moulton, for instance, it will be all Lord Kelmscourt could desire," said Mrs. Garden, smiling at Mary. "Jane, I should like you to drive, when he is to be met; will you, dear? I am going to the station; we'll all go, but would you mind driving the car?"

"You're afraid to drive with me, madrina," Jane reminded her honestly.

"Not so short a distance through these quiet streets. You look so much nicer than Bell on the front seat; your straight young back and shining hair is a pleasanter outlook for a guest than Bell's outlines. Bell is not a particularly safe driver yet. You don't mind, Jane?" Mrs. Garden pleaded.

"Not if you are anxious to have Lord Kelms-

court look at the back you like best." Jane assented so unwillingly that her mother glanced at her, with a laugh in her eyes to see how sullenly Jane's eyes glowed under her long lashes, and how the corners of her short upper lip pulled down.

The long, graceful lines of the Garden car could not surmount the gloom on the faces of all its passengers, save one, on the way to the station to meet Lord Kelmscourt. It was a car of a make that always suggests pleasure, its lines are so sweeping, so elegant. But to-day it looked as though it bore three youthful chief mourners. Jane still sullenly unhappy, Florimel gloomy and angry, Mary so intent upon making the best of it that her form of melancholy was the most depressing of all.

Mrs. Garden seemed to see nothing of all this; she chattered and laughed, and was animatedly blithe, gowned in her most becoming way, her hat and its plumes so shading her face that she looked more than ever her daughters' eldest sister.

In spite of their disposition to regard Lord Wilfrid as their natural enemy, the Garden girls could not help admitting to themselves that he had an attractive face and air as he came briskly

down the platform, carrying his own bag, and smiling a welcome to his waiting escort, though they were not minded to welcome him.

Mrs. Garden received him with pretty cordiality and Mary nobly supplemented her. Jane was not able to maintain her forbidding manner in the light of this guest's frank pleasure at seeing her again and finding her driving the big car, in which art he had given her the first lesson. Florimel thawed a little, also, in this warmer air, compelled additionally by the laws of hospitality. So they drove homeward under an invisible, but, to Mrs. Garden, a perceptible, flag of truce.

"Mrs. Garden wrote me of your splendid courage, Miss Garden, and of its cruel result. My word, but you're a plucky girl! I'm no end glad you've come through so well. I was greatly distressed while they were all fearful you mightn't get off with suffering for a time, I assure you," Lord Kelmscourt said.

"Thank you, Lord Kelmscourt," Mary replied. "It was not pluck that made me try to help that baby; it was seeing her afire. No one could have kept away from her. I am deeply thankful that I was not seriously harmed."

"So he knew when I was so ill; madrina wrote him of her trouble," Mary thought, as she an-

swered him, and, glancing toward Jane, she saw that Jane was making mental note of this fact also.

There was a fire on the hearth that night, not needed, but delightful to sit before after the excellent little dinner, which Anne provided, had been enjoyed. Win had not been under constraint in welcoming Lord Kelmscourt; there were no reservations in his mind when he told him, truthfully, how glad he was to see him again.

“There’s the telephone! Excuse me, madrina, please,” said Mary, rising to get the message. “Oh, Mrs. Moulton!” they heard her in the hall, saying into the receiver, as innocently as if this call had not been prearranged between herself and her guardian’s wife. “Why, yes, I think we can go for a while. Lord Kelmscourt is here. All of us? Jane, Florimel, Win? I’ll tell them, Mrs. Moulton. We’ll be there right away if mother doesn’t mind. Good-bye.” Machiavellian Mary hung up the receiver and returned to the group by the library fireside, innocent and sweet.

“Madrina, Mrs. Moulton asks if we may all go over to her for a short time. Will you mind? Will Lord Kelmscourt mind if ‘the children’

run away to play for an hour or so?" Mary asked, with a great effort to keep her manner unconscious at the last words, but feeling a look of guilt creep into her eyes.

"Go if you like, Mary. Please don't be long. I want Lord Kelmscourt to know you better, to be able to tell his sister, who is a dear friend of mine, what each of my girls is like; he has known Jane and Florimel, when he brought them here in the car, but you he has seen but little," Mrs. Garden answered her.

Lord Kelmscourt had laughed when Mary made her request. Now he arose, and crossed the room to hold the door open for the three young girls as they passed through it.

"I fancy that I know Miss Mary better than she imagines that I do," he said, his pleasant blue eyes so full of mischievous kindness that Mary's dropped before their gaze. "I think that she would be a generous foe," he added, and Mary knew that her ruse, which her mother had accepted without criticism, was transparent to her guest.

"I'm not going, Mary," Jane announced, after the three, with Win, were safely outside the door. "As if I didn't know you asked Mrs. Moulton to call us up, and tell us to come over,

so he'd have a chance to talk to madrina! It's all right; we've got to get out of the way, and let him steal her, but I'm going right up to my room. I don't want to go anywhere to talk and behave."

"Nor I," Florimel echoed. "Jane and I will go upstairs; they'll never know. When you come back, come in at the side door and whistle up the back stairs, Win. We'll hear and come down, as if we'd been with you, but I couldn't see a soul while I knew my little toy-mother was getting stolen, just as Jane says. My gracious! People lock up their spoons!" Florimel added with bitter disgust.

"Do you mean to imply that this Englishman is spoony?" Win suggested, but Florimel could not smile. She stalked upstairs, shaking her head, its black braid of hair appropriate to the mourning stamped on the handsome little face below it.

Mary and Win went on their way, therefore, without the others.

"I'm glad your hands aren't scarred, Mary," Win said, taking one of them to draw it through his arm. "I've always been fond of your capable, shapely hands, my dear. That mark on the right one isn't going to show. There's ro-

mance in the air, Molly darling! Do you know I think that Audrey can see me with her opera glasses screwed down to a shorter range than she could before the Garden of Dreams came off? Sometimes I'm tempted to imagine that Audrey begins to think of me as a possible rival to Wellesley! Do you?"

Mary laughed and squeezed Win's arm with the beautiful hand which he was glad to know was unmarred. "To tell the truth, Win dearest, I haven't noticed these symptoms of better sight in Audrey. But none of us were one bit anxious about her being blind. I'd like to know why she wouldn't care for you, you splendid old Winchester-brother-uncle! I've no doubt you're right," she declared.

"I'm not going to try to get in the way of her college," said Win, thanking Mary with a pressure on the hand in his elbow. "But I'd like to be visible to her, and to know I stood some chance when she came home again."

"Mercy!" said Mary involuntarily. "All that time! Audrey won't graduate; she'll cut off half the course. Perhaps I oughtn't to say so, girls ought to stand by one another, but you're not conceited, Win, so I'm going to tell you that all of the girls feel sure Audrey likes

you a great deal, and only seems to like her college plan better, because she's so sure of you. There; it's out! Of course Audrey honestly longs to study; I don't mean she doesn't," added Mary hastily.

The call on Mr. and Mrs. Moulton was a failure. Mary's whole mind was turned backward to the hearthside at home, where she knew that the Englishman was doing his best to urge her little mother to leave her fireside, and come to preside over his dignified and important house.

"How long ought we stay, do you think, Win?" Mary asked after a half-hour, and Mr. Moulton lay back in his chair to laugh at her.

"'The Considerate Daughter, or The Tables Turned,' a farce in one act, by Miss Mary Garden, with the author in the title rôle!" he chuckled, turning to his wife to share his amusement.

"Really, Mary, there is no reason why you should feel called upon to smooth the way to an event which you dread," observed Mrs. Moulton.

"It isn't that, so much," said candid Mary. "I want to feel sure that I didn't act as horrid as I feel about it; that's one thing. And another is, if, by great good luck, madrina should decide to stay with us I'd want to feel we got her

honestly; that we hadn't tried to keep her by tricks."

"That's the way to feel," Mr. Moulton approved her. "If you can't win a game without peeping at the cards, or slyly moving your ball with your toe, then by all means lose the game. It's worse than lost if it's won by tricks, hey, Mary?"

"I suppose that's what we feel, sir," smiled Mary, rising to go.

Mark accompanied her and Win homeward, as a matter of course. "Well, I'm sure I hope with all my heart your mother will not leave you for this lordly chauffeur of yours," Mark said as they sauntered along. "She seems very young and merry to settle down here in Vine-clad. To be sure you are a great deal younger, yet it would seem natural for you to settle down here, all three of you. But you belong to Vine-clad, whereas your mother seems like a bit broken off of another world."

"That's just it, Mark!" Win said. "That's Lynette."

"Yes, but gradually, and especially since I was burned, she seems to be getting cemented on to our world," Mary said wistfully.

"The Englishman is lucky to have so much

to offer her, if he cares for her," said Mark. Win looked over at him across Mary, surprised at the discouraged note in the young voice.

"Why, Mark, what's up?" he cried.

"Nothing. Nothing down, either; as down as that sounded," returned Mark. "But I see things as they are, young as I am. Mr. Moulton is fine, as good to me as a man can be, and I'm getting on with the work in a way that satisfies him—and he is exacting for his beloved science!—and fairly to satisfy myself. But how shall I ever get on in the world? I'm slightly lame; I'm doing underground work, though I do love it. If I—if I cared about a girl, ever, what would be the use? I'm not ungrateful; I surely love my work, but a young chap does like to see daylight, or at least a crack where it could come in."

"There surely is romance in the air, as I told Mary to-night," thought Win, looking sideways at the fair, quiet face beside him, which gave no sign whether she had a suspicion of what this might mean or not. "Boys are not worrying much about the future unless they have seen The Girl," thought Win. "And Mark would be blind not to see that Mary was indeed The Girl of girls!"

"I wouldn't get impatient, Mark," he said gently. "There's a lot of time for a boy under twenty. Since things have worked so well for you thus far, I'd be content to believe they were going to work out right in the end."

"I'll try," said Mark. "I get sort of raging; then I'm ashamed of it." And Win noticed that Mary, usually so quick to try to comfort every one's anxieties, did not raise her eyes nor speak.

Mark left his friends at the gate, and Mary and Win went around to the side door, and whistled up the back stairs, fulfilling their contract. Jane and Florimel came down to join them, looking more ruffled in spirit than when they had gone up. Jane was white to the lips, and her short upper lip would quiver and draw; her eyes had hollows under them and they had retreated into her head in a way they had, as if to conceal their colour, as well as expression, when they were sorrowful. Florimel, on the contrary, was dark crimson in cheeks and brilliant eyed; she looked like an embodied young electrical storm.

"I won't kiss him and call him father, not if he is the king!" Florimel declared, stopping short at the door, and nearly upsetting Mary's

gravity, though she quivered with apprehension of what they were to be told on its further side. The three girls saw, on entering, the same impassive, perfect-mannered gentleman beside the hearth that they had left there.

Mrs. Garden's eyes were gentle, her smile newly sweet and kind, as Lord Wilfrid arose. Then her three beautiful young daughters entered. She put out her arms to them with a new, motherly gesture which she had learned by the light of the fire that had nearly cost her Mary's life.

"A pleasant evening, my dearests?" she asked. That was all, but her voice gave Jane a swift glow of hope that sent her to her mother's clasp.

They settled themselves beside the fire, which Win replenished.

Obedient to Mrs. Garden's expressed wish, Lord Kelmscourt talked chiefly to Mary, drawing her out, that he might tell his sister how lovely was this eldest child of her friend, whose talents had once delighted that other world which Lynette Devon had forsaken. After a quiet and pleasant hour, in which Mary found pleasure, and Jane and Florimel plucked up heart, they could not have said why, Lord Kelmscourt begged to be allowed to say good-night.

"I am to spend to-morrow here; Mrs. Garden has kindly urged it, and I am promised to be allowed to drive the car many miles, to see as much as I can of this part of your great state. Then I go home to England, carrying ineffaceable memories of the only American family I know in its home, and of these three girls whom, I am proud to remember, England may claim a share in, as she gave them their mother," he said. The little speech had a formality about it that did not prevent its ringing sincere. It also conveyed to the three girls, distinctly, the impression of a valedictory.

When Win had gone with Lord Kelmscourt to his room, Mary, Jane, and Florimel turned with mute insistence to their mother. They did not speak, except through their imploring eyes. Mrs. Garden went to them, holding out her hands, with her pretty grace, half crying, half laughing.

"You were horribly frightened, weren't you, my treasures?" she cried. "Once I could not have believed that I should have refused the shelter, the honour of that good man's love, nor the rank and luxury he would give me. But I have found out what it means to be a mother, my little lassies! I could not be less your

mother, could not leave you again, to mount the throne! Let me stay close to you always, my darlings, for every day I shall love you better and grow a better woman in my home. Oh, children, when I thought I might lose Mary, then I saw, I saw! I couldn't be Lady Kelmscourt, dearests, because I want to be nothing and nobody on all the earth but just the Garden girls' little madrina!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“RICH WITH THE SPOILS OF NATURE”

“It certainly is convenient to be grown up,” said Florimel, when the entire family had returned from bidding Lord Kelmscourt a final good-bye at the station. He was gone forever, and, inconsistently, the three girls were truly sorry. He had been so kind, so self-effacing, his trustworthiness was so evident in driving the car, and in looking after its occupants, that if there had been any way of holding him, while at the same time holding him *off*—from stepfatherhood—the Garden girls would have been delighted to have added him permanently to their lives.

“It’s quite as convenient to be a little short of grown up, often, Mellie. What are you thinking of that makes you say that?” asked Mary, rapidly divesting herself of her gown, and getting into a soft blue lounging gown, as a preparation for throwing herself across the foot of the bed for an hour’s rest before supper.

Florimel unbraided her black hair and dropped it over the back of her chair, rocking furiously to fan it.

“We’ve been driving and driving, hours, and you and Jane and I were miserable, miserable-minded, because we were so sorry to think Lord Kelmscourt had to go away and be a rejected suitor. Rejected suitors are perfectly tragic in stories! We could hardly answer when he talked to us, and we all acted as if we were babies, standing on one foot with our thumbs in our mouths, we were so awkward and embarrassed. And here was the rejected suitor driving away, as calm as milk, and madrina chatting with him, easy and natural! She was not a bit embarrassed; neither was the R. S.! Of course Englishmen are supposed to be just like Gibraltar, never showing what they feel. But I still think it’s great to be grown up. It carries you through things. I’d love to be able to refuse to marry some one, and then act the next day as if he’d dropped in for tea, and I happened to be out of it! Not so upset; I’ve seen people much more embarrassed when they had company, and something to eat was spoiled, than madrina was to-day! It’s being grown up, and out in society.”

Jane stood in the doorway laughing; she, too, had on her kimono, and she was wandering and combing her hair, after her incorrigible habit of dressing on the march.

“You’ll have to see that you change as you grow up, Mel, or you’ll never hide your feelings,” she advised. “Well, I’m as sorry as I can be that nice Lord Kelmscourt couldn’t stay—some other way! If only he could have been our chauffeur, a chauffeuring friend, or a friendly chauffeur, living near enough to spend lots of evenings with us, like Mr. and Mrs. Moulton! He’s splendid. And the clever little points he taught me in driving to-day! You can see he’s one of those well-trained, all-around people who do everything well. I’m sure he’s very fond of *madrina*; he was so willing to give her up.”

“Of all reasons for thinking he liked her a lot!” cried Florimel.

Jane nodded her head hard. “You couldn’t tell how unwilling he *felt*, but the quietly willing way he acted, I mean,” she persisted. “A cheap little liking might make a row, but a big, deep liking would consider *madrina*, and not make her uncomfortable.”

Mary raised her head, and poked her pillow

into a bunch, as she regarded Jane with her customary admiration.

“I wonder if you won’t be a novelist instead of a singer or actress, Janie,” she said. “You do see things!”

“Maybe I’ll be a telescope,” said Jane, turning on her heel and swinging down the hall, singing foolishly:

*“Jane could see when she’d look, so she wrote a
great book,*

*Jane could see when she’d look, so she wrote a
great book.”*

The three girls were ready for supper before their mother, and they went out into the garden to wait for her. Whenever the Garden girls had to wait, or had a few spare moments, or had work to do that could be done there, it was as natural for them to stroll out into the garden paths as it would have been for a bird to fly out of an open window.

Mrs. Garden was not long following them. She came running downstairs, all in white, and stole up behind Mary, who had not seen her coming. “Why so grave, my little grandmother?” she asked.

“Was I?” Mary turned to her with a smile that was far from grave. “I was wondering

whether those hybrid tea roses we planted this spring, which are blooming so well over there, would really prove hardy and survive the winter."

"Did I ever tell you that the Kelmscourt place, Lord Kelmscourt's splendid old house, time of George I, has an acre of nothing but roses? Oh, me, it's wonderful! You really know nothing of gardens over here." Mrs. Garden dropped her head and sighed wistfully, not an unmistakable sigh, but a delicately done one, conveying a regret that was repressed, struggling to the day.

Instantly Florimel pounced on her, while Mary and Jane exchanged a look of terror.

"Now you're sorry!" cried Florimel, her voice tragic. "We don't blame you, but now you're sorry!" She stalked away, misery in her whole attitude. Mrs. Garden threw up her head with a laugh, her eyes dancing with mischief, swung on the toes of her dainty little slippers like a dancer, and ran after Florimel.

"You little gypsy explosive baby!" she cried, catching her youngest girl around the shoulders and turning her to see her mother's laughing face. "I thought that would tease you, silly little zanies! Why, girls, can't you see how

happy I am? I'm as pleased as if I'd found a lost treasure chest! I was not obliged to leave you, of course, and I didn't come anywhere near going, but I feel as though I had escaped a great danger! My lassies, I want you to know, once for all, that I'd rather be your mother than anything else on earth. I've said that before, but do realize how true it is! And I love the old Garden house and the old Garden garden, and I'd be horribly jealous for you of any interest that would divide me. I want to be yours, entirely yours! I've found it's the best thing in all the world to be a mother—even a toy-mother! Come, hug me!" Mrs. Garden held out her arms, laughing, but with the merry eyes that called to Mary and Jane, as well as to Florimel, shining through moisture on their lashes.

"Well, Lynette Garden! You bet we'll hug you!" cried Florimel, and no one felt that the slangy response was blameworthy this time. There seemed to be need of vigorous expression.

The Garden girls crushed the little white-clad figure in a threefold, bearlike embrace. The day was won, their mother was won; the last uncertainty as to her loving them well enough to be happy with them, at the price of the loss of her old world of pleasures and admiration, was

settled. The strange relationship, in which the daughters were almost as much their mother's mother as she was their mother; the protecting, petting, playful love they gave her, the admiring, dependent, comrade love which she gave them, was cemented, assured forever. It was an exceedingly happy, radiant Garden family that came in to supper when Anne called the four young women.

After supper, in the twilight of the garden, as usual, the mother and the girls, with Win—and Chum, as always, at Florimel's feet—sat expecting Mr. and Mrs. Moulton. They heard Mark's halting step coming down the street, unaccompanied. Mark's lameness was less visible than audible. It swayed his body but slightly, but it gave an irregular beat to his footfall.

"Mark is coming without them!" said Mary.

Mark came in at the side gate and across the path to the group. "Thought I'd find you here," he said. "Aren't you chilly?"

"Not yet, but we shall be soon," said Mrs. Garden. "It was uncomfortably warm in the sunshine to-day, but there's a chilliness creeping into the evening."

"September," suggested Mark. "Summer's

over; though it takes the sun awhile to find it out, the stars know it. I've a good deal to tell you. May I bring a chair?"

"With my help, Markums," said Win, rising to take one arm of the garden chair which Mark went over to fetch.

"Oh, why not go in at once? We shall only have to move after Mark gets under way with his story," said Florimel, who hated to be interrupted when she was interested.

"No; let's cling to every possible moment of our last garden evenings this year!" cried Jane, and Mark dropped into the chair which Win considerately halted near Mary.

"I don't know how to tell you," said Mark, as they all looked at him, waiting for him to begin. "I had a birthday to-day."

"And never told us!" Jane reproached him.

"I don't see how we happened not to have found out your date. We always keep the birthdays; we love to. Why didn't you let us know, Mark?" Mary exclaimed.

"Because you'd have bought me one of those girl-chosen neckties no fellow ever wants to wear, Mary," Mark teased her.

"Are you nineteen to-day, Mark?" asked Mrs. Garden.

“That’s all, Mrs. Garden, but don’t you think I’m pretty far along for my age?” asked Mark. “Mr. and Mrs. Moulton had found out my birthday date some time ago. Dear Garden blossoms, they’ve given me a present.” The boy stopped short; evidently he was profoundly moved.

“Oh, Mark, what?” cried Mary, leaning forward, catching his excitement.

“A present with a condition attached to it, but such a condition!” Mark resumed. “They have asked me to promise to devote my life to carrying on Mr. Moulton’s work; with him, while he lives, for him after he is dead. Mr. Moulton thinks that I shall be competent to do this, and he has asked me to undertake it. It’s a great thing—both ways. A great thing to do and a great opportunity for me.” Again Mark paused.

“It’s big, old Mark!” said Win. “But the present in return?”

“If I will accept Mr. Moulton’s trust in me and devote my life to his work, he—they, his wife and he—will adopt me legally, not taking their name, you know, but as their heir. They’ll make me their son. It’s—it’s awful!” Mark choked, and his head went down on the back of his chair, to which he turned his face, utterly unable to command himself any longer.

"Mark, dear, it's not awful; it's beautiful! Beautiful both ways!" cried Jane.

"I don't know whether I'm more glad for you or for the dear Moultons," said Mary.

"You don't have to be glad separately; it's all one," said Florimel wisely.

"Old chap, I'm too glad to say how glad!" cried Win, slapping Mark on the back with such vigour that it had a tonic effect.

Mrs. Garden had not spoken, but the touch of her hand on Mark's shoulder was eloquent of her rejoicing sympathy.

Mark faced them all again, wiping his eyes, unashamed. "I didn't cry when I was down and out," he said. "A fellow doesn't feel so much like crying when he's got his teeth set, and he's standing things. But this—this heavenly kindness gets me."

"It would any one," said Mary. "But it isn't all kindness, Mark. Mr. Moulton was anxious, troubled when he could not see any one who would be likely to finish what he had begun; you know what that means to a scientist, for you are one yourself, in your younger way. And Mrs. Moulton has been lonely. I can see that she leans on you as much, in her way, as her husband does for the botanical work.

They're very fond of you and this is just as good for them as for you—not that I want to belittle what they do for you, but it wouldn't be right for you to think of it as in the least a charity."

"I don't, Mary; I see it just as you do," said Mark. "But you can't understand, not even you people who are so quick to understand things, what it means to belong. My father and I were chums. When he died it wasn't so much that I was left poor, when I had supposed we were well off, but the relatives I had rather did me, and I didn't belong to a soul. Take a dog; it isn't enough to feed him. A good dog craves a master, he's got to belong to some one. I knew a lost dog once that some people fed; he wasn't hungry, but he was heart-broken till he was adopted by some one who loved him. In a week you wouldn't have known him; chirked right up, *belonged* again, you see. Now if a dog feels that, so does a boy. You've all been like old friends to me, the Moultons couldn't have been better, but I didn't belong to any one. Mr. and Mrs. Moulton told me about this only a little while ago, at supper time, but I know it's making me over already. Oh, my soul, what a birthday present!"

"You're going to accept the conditions?"

hinted Mrs. Garden, with her little look of mischief.

“Accept them! I don’t believe I am; I think they simply swallow me up. I would rather do something of the sort Mr. Moulton is doing than be Romulus and Remus and found Rome! Think of it! I used to intend to go to college, and then devote my life to science, but father was killed in the fire and the whole game was up, college and affording to work at a science—botany—and all! And then I wandered into Vineclad, looking for a bookkeeper’s job which I heard was here, and walked right into the fulfilment of my ambition! Talk about our lives being laid out for us! Did you ever know anything like it? And Mr. and Mrs. Moulton’s adopted son! The finest people! And everything on earth I could desire made possible, just when no one could have seen a chance for me!” Mark’s eyes as they rested on Mary were so alight that hers fell.

“Lucky isn’t the only one lucky,” said Florimel, rising with Lucky in her arms; the cat always found her after a while and cuddled down in her lap wherever she was seated. Florimel held him close to Mark’s face. “Kiss him and tell him you and he are twin brothers in lucki-

ness! But don't you forget, Mark Walpole, that Florimel Garden made you come home with her that day, you and Chum, both."

"Indeed I'll not forget it, Miss Blackbird," said Mark. "But I won't kiss Lucky; I'll shake his paw instead. We are triplets in luck, Lucky, Chum, and I! And it is the cold fact that the littlest Garden girl was our mascot, all three of us."

"The littlest Garden girl can be some good, if she is only the gypsy and the blackbird, dancing and whistling," said Florimel with dignity. "Here come Mr. and Mrs. Moulton. We'd better go in; Mrs. Moulton can't sit out so late, now."

"They let me come ahead of them to skim my own cream," said Mark. "Bless their splendid old hearts! I hope I'll never fail them."

"Sons that fail usually walk into failure. You won't fail them, Mark," said Mrs. Garden, rising and helplessly trying to draw her scarf around her, to which end her three girls, Win, and Mark jumped to help her.

The Gardens and Mark met Mr. and Mrs. Moulton at the steps. Mr. Moulton smiled at Mary with the peculiar tenderness his eyes held for her, mingled with a quizzical look that was new.

"How do you like my son Mark? This is his first birthday; it was Mark Walpole's nineteenth birthday, Marygold," he said.

"Dear Mr. Moulton, we never, never shall be able to say how glad we all are; as glad as we can be for you, too," said Mary, seizing her guardian by both hands.

"Ah, then I can see that you like my son Mark, for I'm sure you would not rejoice if I had a son whom you disapproved," returned Mr. Moulton, swinging both of Mary's arms by the extended hands, and ending by laying her hands on his shoulders while he kissed her cheek.

"I've liked Mark from the first time I saw him," said Mrs. Moulton, temperately, but with a look at Mark that made her words sound warmer than their registered temperature. "When he came over from your house to talk to Mr. Moulton, he turned back to straighten a rug, and he helped me to catch my canary, which had flown out of his cage; he handled the little creature gently and wooed him with soft notes. There's a boy, I said to myself, who is orderly; witness the rug. Gentle, patient; witness the bird. Kind and respectful; witness his bothering about the concerns of a woman of my age. I decided on the spot that Mark was a

good boy; of course it was easy to see that he was well-bred. I've never altered my opinion."

Mark looked at her, rosy red even to the tips of his ears. He went up to her with an entirely new freedom and affection of manner.

"See here, Mother Moulton," he said. "You mustn't praise me to total strangers!"

It was not hard to see that Mrs. Moulton was delighted by this little speech. Not less than Mark she felt—the childless woman in a happy home, and with a husband such as few women can boast—that it was a great deal "to belong," to belong in a motherly way, to a fine boy.

"I've told Mark that I will not ask him to take my name," said Mr. Moulton. "He is to be my son, inheriting my property and my work, fulfilling what I cannot finish. But he loved his father, and I should not wish to supplant him, even if I could, which would be impossible nonsense to discuss with a boy worth his salt. But as we all know that when 'The Study of the Flora of New York' is published, long after I am dead, it will be under my name and Mark's, as joint authors—I believe I'd be glad if he would consent to become Mark Moulton Walpole. Would you object, Mark? Mary, urge my request."

“It needs no urging, sir,” said Mark. “I’d be glad to take your name. There’s no way I can express fully how much I owe you, nor how I’m yours. That goes a little toward doing it.”

“As to owing, that’s nonsense. We serve one another, we three members of the Moulton family. It’s not nonsense to feel that you belong to us beyond verbal labelling. It may be nonsense, but it is true, that I’d like my name to be incorporated with yours, so that when the book appears, compiled by Austin Moulton and Mark Moulton Walpole, those who see it will recognize you as my kin. As you surely are, my boy, though you did not spring from my stock. We are of the same botanical genus—and genius!—at least. Much obliged for your instant consent to grafting my name on yours. Come home, Mark; Mrs. Moulton is waiting.” Mr. Moulton laid his hand on Mark’s shoulder and the elder man and the younger one looked into each other’s eyes with a smile that said everything.

The Garden girls, Mrs. Garden, and Win went with them to the gate. Florimel chased Mark with the intention of boxing his ears twenty times, the birthday chastisement, with “one to grow on.” She was fleet-footed, but

Mark out-dodged her. Florimel hung, breathless and defeated, on the gate watching the Moulton party down the road. Mrs. Garden, Mary, Jane, and Win waved their hands just as wildly as Florimel did, till the three visitors were out of sight. Then Florimel stepped off of the gate and voiced the sentiments of her family in her own way.

“Isn’t it hallelujahfied? Makes you want to sob your cheers, you’re so stirred-up glad!” she said.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

“AND FEEL THAT I AM HAPPIER THAN I KNOW”

The Garden girls had always kept Garden Day, at least since they had been old enough to devise it. It was the ingathering feast of their garden, the day when the dahlia, gladiola, and other summer bulbs were taken up, and the annual additions to the tulips, daffodils, narcissi, and crocuses were made. When the delicate plants which were worth saving were potted to be housed, the autumn seeds sown for spring growing, the pansies put to bed under leaves and straw, the roses laid down and covered, the stalks of vines straw-wound, and plants needing protection straw-thatched. No gardener was allowed to perform these tasks alone. Mary, Jane, and Florimel had insisted, from the time that the older two were small girls, and Florimel was not much more than a baby, on bidding their garden this autumnal farewell. For, though they would wander through its paths during the warm days which stray into November, and,

even in the winter, spend hours out of doors, this day marked the formal closing of the garden. They observed this feast on the 30th of October, when the weather allowed, or when it did not fall on a Sunday; in case of storm, or when the day came on Sunday, the garden day was kept on November 2d.

“It should be either the eve of the eve of All-hallow, or on All Souls’ Day,” Mary had decided when they were discussing the permanent date of their observance. “We can’t have it on Halloween, because there is likely to be something going on that we’d want to take part in. But we ought to keep our garden day near to All Saints’, or else right on All Souls’ Day. Those are harvest days, you see: the ingathering of beautiful characters. I think we ought to keep our beautiful flowers’ day at that time.”

“You nice Mary!” Jane endorsed her. “And let’s call it Slumber Day, because we tuck all our flowers up in their beds then.”

Thus Slumber Day became a settled observance with the Gardens, and around it many little customs gathered, pleasant little fanciful things which, once done, seemed good to the girls and were noted for repetition.

“This year there are four girls instead of

three, little madrina!" said Mary. "You mustn't work and get tired—we get so tired on this day we can hardly eat our supper! But you must help on Slumber Day, or it won't seem right. We forgot to tell you about the uniform! Isn't that too bad! Of course something else will answer."

"Anne told me about it; mine is ready," Mrs. Garden said, and she looked delighted to be able to surprise her girls with this answer. "Breakfast at seven on that day, Anne says. I wonder whether I can get ready so early! I shall, whether I can or not!" Mrs. Garden hastily forestalled Mary's coming suggestion that the hour be made later for her benefit.

She was as good as her word. At ten minutes to seven she ran downstairs, dressed in the Slumber Day uniform, a dark-blue, plain gingham, short skirt, plain shirt waist, tan gingham collar and cuffs—selected because it was so near loam colour—an enamel cloth apron, long enough to kneel on, rubber gloves, and a cap of the dark-blue gingham, made like a dusting cap, but each one ornamented with a bright-green cotton wing, wired so that it stood straight and defiant and gave a touch of festivity to the otherwise sternly practical costume.

“Doesn’t she look dear in that?” cried Florimel, rushing over to snatch her mother off her feet in an enthusiastic salute.

“I wonder why it is, but if any one really is pretty and stylish she looks better in working clothes than she does dressed up! Mary and I would rather have had a red wing in our cap, but they had to be alike, and Jane isn’t quite as pretty in red as she is in other things.”

Jane laughed. “Pussy-cat way of putting it, Mel, creeping on tippy-toes! Fancy bright red on my hair!” she cried.

“How nice, how pretty you all look—well, yes; I suppose I might say *we* all look, since I’m dressed like you, but I can’t see the effect of the fourth uniform,” Mrs. Garden corrected herself, seeing Florimel’s protest coming. “You look like a trio costumed for something in light opera.”

“The Digger Maidens,” suggested Win. “I’ve got to go to the office this morning, as I told you, but I promise to help you all the afternoon. So long, till then.” He went off whistling. Jane turned from the window with a wave of her hand to Win, who chanced to look back.

“I think Win is as nice as a boy can be. He’s so indifferent about it, too; doesn’t seem to think he’s good looking and clever, and he

couldn't be kinder, nor more truthful and straight. Sometimes he strikes me all over again, as if I'd just met him! He's a splendid boy, honestly," she said.

"When I was here before, I mean when I first came here, your father used to say that Win would grow up to be the kind of man that never seems to do anything in particular, but which quietly fills a big place in the community. Win was but a little lad then, yet his half-brother was perfectly right about him. We all think that a great man is one with great talents, or who achieves great deeds, but, after all, if one who has a great heart, a great conscience, great truth, great steadfastness, great loyalty, isn't a great man, I wonder who is? And Win has all these things," said Mrs. Garden.

"Why, madrina, how nice!" cried Mary, delighted. "I never had the least idea that you cared so much about Win."

"Win didn't care so much about me, Mary, when I came home," said Mrs. Garden, with a smile. "He had been devoted to me when I lived here, but he could not forgive me for leaving you for my beloved work in the world. I don't blame him; he could not understand what slight excuse there was for it. I see now that its

principal justification was that I was not prepared to bring you up; I had to learn. But now Win is forgiving me, and, I hope, getting fonder of me again."

"Little madrina, you are growing up, my child! You are almost as old as Jane, sometimes, and we all know how profoundly old Jane is, in her thoughtful mining into things! Come along, little Garden girls, little Lynette, Janie, Florimel! We must begin our Slumber Day ceremonies!" cried Mary.

Arming themselves with a trowel apiece, the Garden girls, to follow Mary's example and counting Mrs. Garden as one of them, went out of the house. They marched to the great ox-heart cherry tree which gave its shade to one corner of the grassy end of the garden where the seats stood, and which gave its delicious fruit abundantly, late in June, to the Gardens and to their neighbours. Here the girls paused. "We first sing the lullaby Slumber Day, you know," Florimel explained to her mother.

Under the tree, with trowels waving in a cradle motion, the girls sang "Kücken's Lullaby." It was really pleasing in effect; Florimel sang acceptably, Jane's voice was extraordinary, and Mary's alto was sweet and deep.

"We are sorry we have not started in with another lullaby, but we sang this long ago, when we didn't know any other," said Florimel apologetically in response to her mother's praise. "That's always our opening hymn."

The forenoon passed in work that was solid, although varied by fantastic ceremonies. As, for instance, "The Gladiola Gladness" was a triumphant dance in which the gladiola bulbs were borne aloft in a basket, in a whirling dance, celebrating their past blossoming.

"Jane does this because we think she's most like a gladiolus, thin and reddish and brilliant," Florimel explained.

Mary had the ceremony of the pansy covering. She covered them with leaves and made mysterious passes over their visible little forms.

*"Pansies for thought, sleep as you ought,
Sleep, but awake for your true lover's sake,"*

Mary repeated as she did this; it was the incantation of her childhood.

Florimel took up the dahlias. The girls had early recognized their own types, and had distributed tasks accordingly. Florimel's dark, vigorous beauty was suited to dahlias as well as Mary's quiet loveliness harmonized with

pansies. With the dahlia bulbs Florimel executed a solo march, formal steps and courtly gestures its ritual.

So the morning went on, filled with work, but work brightened to play, and elevated close to poetry by all sorts of curious fancies. Mary, Jane, and Florimel were serious, almost reverent in their fantastic ceremonies. Though they were almost grown up, the association of these things with childish faith made the day and its events to them something between fantasy and reality.

Mrs. Garden watched them, participating in what they did, as far as she was able, with the keenest enjoyment and no less wonder. This curious day brought her into touch with her children's lost childhood. She realized what clever little beings they had been, developing in their own way, set apart by their father's theories of education. The pang with which she realized this, her pride in them and regret for the days in which she had been separated from them, days never to be recovered, showed her how far she had travelled from the old Lynette Devon, whose joy had been the public; how far toward Lynette Garden, whose increasing joy was in being her beautiful and gifted children's mother.

Joel Bell was an amazed witness of the Slumber Day ceremonies. What they represented he could not imagine; why "great girls like these should carry on so" he could still less imagine. He wheeled barrowloads of straw and leaves, dug and tied and trenched, with unvarying gravity, but his pitying disapproval peeped forth.

Noon afforded the first moment when conversation was possible. One of the unwritten laws of Slumber Day was that no talking was allowed; participants in ceremonies are not supposed to converse while they are going on. Joel availed himself of this interlude.

"Say, Mis' Garden," he began, "about that nus'ry you was thinkin' of foundin'. Seem's if it couldn't hardly be, 'thout they was a widder, or some such woman, ready to let the children be dumped with her. Who'd look after 'em?"

"We were saying just that, Bell," said Mrs. Garden. "My daughters thought we could find such a person, but so far none has been suggested. Do you know one?"

Joel Bell shook his head. "Fact, I don't," he said. "I spoke to one woman, but she quick showed she thought I meant her to take Mis' Bell's place, my wife's, you know, or else she

meant to take it. I didn't wait to find out which; either way my safety laid in flight, an' I flew."

In spite of themselves the girls burst out laughing at this.

"Don't you laugh, girls," said Joel, with deeper seriousness. "There's been many a unfort'nate man married before this because he hadn't the ready money, nor yet the courage to go to law to prove he had no notion of takin' a woman who ran him down like a hunted deer. It's a dreadful thing when a woman that's at all set picks out some man to marry him! Matrimony is seriouser, anyway, than girls like you thinks, an' I believe it's the dooty of older folks to try to make the younger generation sense that."

Mrs. Garden could never accommodate herself to the American freedom of speech on the part of those whom she employed. "Such awfully bad manners!" she said in her most English accent, when her disapproval was not more severe. Now she turned toward the house. "Anne must have called us, my dears," she said. "Very well, Bell; we will try to find a matron for our Day Nursery."

At the house Anne met them. "I called,

but you did not hear, Mrs. Garden,” she said. “Lunch is nearly ready. Jane, Florimel, there is the strangest person waiting to see you. She came some twenty minutes ago, but would not let me disturb you. She would not give her name. She said she wanted to see one of the Garden girls, ‘the one with red hair,’ she said, or a younger one with black hair, but the red-haired one she would rather see. She is fearfully frowsy; light hair, I truly think it is bleached, but maybe not. She is in mourning, yet she has on a good deal of queer jewellery and a white voile waist, all covered with coarse machine embroidery. She is a queer person, Jane, altogether. What can she want of you?”

“I’ve no idea, Anne; can’t imagine who she is,” Jane began, but Florimel said:

“I can! It’s Miss Alyssa Aldine, and somebody’s died.”

“Oh, Florimel!” Jane remonstrated. She did not like to remember that she had sought Miss Aldine—Mrs. Peter Mivle—to ask advice as to her career. Nevertheless, Jane hastened to the library, not waiting to alter her costume, instantly sure that Florimel was right, and that it was Miss Aldine whom she should find waiting for her.

Florimel *was* right. Miss Aldine, quite as blowsy in her mourning as she had been in her pink wrapper, arose to meet Jane as she entered, followed close by Florimel.

"How are you, my dears?" she said. "I don't suppose you remember me."

"Surely we do," said Jane, putting out her hand with a sudden cordiality. She saw that Mrs. Mivle looked a great deal older, and sad and worn, and, Jane-like, was moved to welcome her. "Surely we remember you, Mrs. Mivle. You were very nice to me when I was so silly as to bother you."

"No trouble at all," said Mrs. Mivle, tears springing to her eyes. "You were an awfully pretty pair to drop into a body's room so unexpected. It does a body good to see girls like you. And now you don't call me Miss Aldine, but you give me my sainted Petey's name. I suppose you saw by the papers my loss?"

"No, we haven't seen," said Jane, feeling her way. "I noticed you were in mourning. It isn't—you don't mean——"

"Yes, I do!" sobbed Mrs. Mivle. "My blessed Petey took sick, and before we knew he was more'n kind of off his feed, you might say, he was past all hope—appendicitis! Ain't it

awful? Sydney Fleming—you remember, his stage name, that was?—was simply great in the lead, could do anything. We acted together like we were made for it. And it's my belief we were. Things come out like that in this world, once in a while; folks sent into it to be with certain other folks, for work and pleasure. And say, we *were* happy, honest! Petey and me got on when we was in private life just like the leading lady and her support does in the slickest plays. It's broke me up something fierce to lose him. See, I'm wearing his ring! I won't part with it while I can hold it, but I'm down on my luck. Comp'ny burst up, couldn't get a leading man fit to take Pete's place, I was all in; couldn't do justice to my repertoire, we played to poor houses, manager was up against it; sorry for me, sorry Pete died, but sorry for himself when he run behind. He had to shut down, and it took pretty much every cent I had to get home; we was playin' the State of Washington when the end come. So I don't know how long I'll be keeping poor blessed Petey's ring."

The poor creature, kind and honest, though grotesque and slangy, pulled off her shabby glove and displayed the huge diamond, of yellowish

cast, which Jane and Florimel remembered on her lost "Petey's" hand.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" murmured Jane. "I'm truly sorry. Not that it does you any good. What will you do?"

"My dear, that's exactly what I've come to ask you," returned Mrs. Mivle earnestly. "You come once to ask my advice. Says I to myself, I believe I'll go hunt up that little handsome red-haired girl, and her little beauty black-haired sister, and ask them to find me a job. I haven't one friend outside the perfession. I've gotter go to work at some ordinary job. My acting days are over. Not an act left in me; haven't the heart. Do you suppose I could act Lady of Lyons with another playing Claude Melnotte in Petey's place? Not on your life! Do you think there'd be anything for me to do here in Vineclad? There often is work, and few to do it, in one-night-stand kind of towns—I beg your pardon! It's a real nice place, but you've got to admit it's small *and* slow! You can ask any one about me. There isn't a thing to be said of me I wouldn't just as lieves as not was said. I'm honest, if I do say it, and I'm good natured. Pete always said any one had a cinch keeping his temper living with me. I'd do anything I could

do; no pride left in me. All my pride was per-fesh'nal, and, as I say, my acting days is over, with Petey's life. Get me a job at anything, there's a dear child! I'll do my best, though, to tell the truth, I wouldn't advise any one to get me to cook. Petey used to say: 'Nettie,' he'd say, 'the quality of mercy is not strained; neither is your soup.' Oh, my Petey! Always like that, jokin', and witty, and great, simply *great!*" Peter's widow gulped painfully. There was no doubt that her grief was profound.

"You wouldn't care to look after children all day, would you?" asked Jane. "We have a charity we are starting here. It began in a sort of play; we began it, my other sister and I, but it is going to be a real charity, and go on far and long, we hope. We'll tell you about it. But you must have lunch with us. Please excuse me a moment, while I tell my mother and sister you are here, and then we'll have lunch. Why, I forgot! Florimel, please take Mrs. Mivle up to my room and let her cool her face and hands with fresh water. I know one doesn't care to eat after one has been talking fast and feeling sad. You musn't say a word, Mrs. Mivle! As you told me about my visit to you: it isn't any trouble!" Jane ran away, and, as rapidly as she

could, prepared her mother and Mary for what they were to meet. Mary apprehended the situation quicker, having already known of the former Miss Aldine. But after Mrs. Garden understood, she was as ready as her girls were to befriend this unfortunate one, who stood on the lowest rung of the ladder of fame, on which, and in another and higher form of dramatic art, Lynette Devon's little feet had once balanced.

Mrs. Mivle was completely overcome by the kindness which she received. Before lunch was over Mrs. Mivle had been offered and had accepted the post of matron of the Day Nursery. It was arranged that she was to return to New York, where she had left her slender belongings, and fetch them to Vineclad at once. She went away immediately after lunch in the station carriage summoned for her, tearfully grateful, relieved, and nearer happy than had seemed possible to her ever to be again.

The Gardens and Anne watched her away, amazed at this sudden solution of a difficulty. They were not a little pleased that the Day Nursery was proving its right to exist, though it had been begun with light-hearted indifference, by doing a great service for a lonely woman, whose merit was so overlaid with misleading ex-

ternals that it was hard to see what could have become of her without its refuge.

“And I know she’ll make the babies happier than almost any one else in all the world could!” said Jane, as if she were answering some one, though no one had made a comment.

“She’s very good indeed, kind and honest,” said Anne Kennington, who was keen to judge. “I’m sure she’ll make every child that comes near her quite wild over her, when she begins singing songs to them and amusing them; you can see she’s that sort! But, my heart, Mrs. Garden, dear, what slang they’ll learn from her!”

“Oh, no, Anne, perhaps not. We’ll try to get her to talk and dress less picturesquely,” said Mrs. Garden, who had whole-heartedly espoused the dethroned leading lady’s cause.

The afternoon ceremonies of Slumber Day were resumed and carried to their end. Win came home, as he had promised, to take part in the finale. He brought Mark with him; they had to be told of the singular guest and her prospective office, in spite of the rule against interrupting the routine of Slumber Day by conversation.

Joel Bell listened to the tale with, literally, open mouth. “Well, how little you can tell

what's around the corner before you turn it!" he said. "To think you've been the means of givin' a sorrowful lady, an' a lady without a way to git her bread, both comfort an' bread an' jam, so to speak!"

"Everything is done; the Slumber Day ceremonies are over," announced Mary at last. "We have put the garden to sleep till another spring. Now our closing rite, then for supper! Mark, you may take part in it. We each in turn bid our garden sleep well till next year, and then we tell it what has been the best gift we have had this year, and ask it to make the gift grow and blossom next year. Florimel first; we begin at the youngest."

"No, Chum and Lucky first!" laughed Florimel, and she held the cat's, and then the dog's, head close to the ground, under the sun dial, where this last event always took place.

"Good-night, sweet garden, our best friend. My best gift has been my home. Keep it and increase it another year for me," she said in turn, for each. Then when she released them, Lucky ran up the lilac bush, and sat there, and Chum ran around and around the grass, tail out and mouth stretched, laughing, taking it all as a frolic.

Florimel, Jane, and Mary said the same thing:

“Good-night, sweet garden, our best friend; rest well and waken refreshed. My best gift has been my mother. Keep her for me, and increase her health and happiness next year.”

“Good-night, old garden, true friend,” said Win. “My best gift this year”—he hesitated—“has been hope and greater happiness. Fructify both for me next year.”

Mark bent over the sod.

“Good-night, new-old friend, noble garden,” he said. “My best gift this year has been through the Gardens—home, affection, hope. Keep my gifts for me, and let them grow great another year.”

Mrs. Garden bowed low, her hand upon the sun dial.

“Good-night, sweet garden, patient friend. My best gift was won coming back to thee. My best gift this year, and for all years, is my children. Guard their health, and help me keep them, the flower of your soil, forever.”

She straightened herself and looked around. Mary’s deep blue eyes, Jane’s golden ones Florimel’s glowing black ones smiled at her.

“My Garden blossoms,” she cried. “My best gift, truly, is that I’ve learned to be your mother!”

Mary turned toward the house, a hand on her mother's shoulder, the other on Jane's arm. Florimel, behind them, encircled her mother with her hands on her sisters' shoulders.

"Now we are all going from our happy, put-to-bed garden into our happy, waking house! Come, boys, both!" Mary said.

"We're so blessed that we can't quite know how happy we are. Isn't that beautiful? To know we're happier than we can know we are?" said Jane.

"I wonder if we aren't the very luckiest girls in the world?" said Florimel. "I wonder if we could call our garden fairies, and ask them who were the happiest girls in the world, what they'd say?"

And from the steps, where she stood in the setting sun, came Anne's voice calling, like an answer:

"Garden girls! Garden girls!"

THE END



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